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Even If It's Not True It's True: Using Unreliable Ḥadīths in Sunni Islam

Jonathan A.C. Brown

Abstract

Sunni Islam is at heart a cult of authenticity, with the science of ḥadīth criticism functioning as a centerpiece designed to distinguish authentic attributions to the Prophet from forgeries. It is thus surprising that even after ḥadīth scholars had sifted sound ḥadīths from weak, mainstream Sunni Islam allowed the use of unreliable ḥadīths as evidence in subjects considered outside of the core areas of law. This majority stance, however, did not displace minority schools of thought that saw the use of unreliable ḥadīths as both a danger to social morality and contrary to the stated values of Islamic thought. This more stringent position has burgeoned in the early modern and modern periods, when eliminating the use of weak ḥadīths has become a common call of both Salafi revivalists and Islamic modernists. This article explores and traces the history of the various Sunni schools of thought on the use of weak and forged ḥadīths from the third/ninth century to the present day.

Keywords

ḥadīth, forgery, weak ḥadīths, Salafism, Islamic law

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In which of these ways can the lie be useful to the god? Is it because of his ignorance of the past, making fiction as like truth as possible?—That would be ridiculous.

– Plato, *Republic* 382d

And I seek refuge with God against attributing to the Messenger of God (ṣ) what he did not say….

– Ibn Isḥāq introducing the text of the Prophet's first *khuṭba* in Medina[1]

The Islamic religious tradition is at heart a cult of authenticity. The Qur'ān rebukes earlier communities for adulterating their revealed books, an iniquity from which God avows to shield the Muslims by assuring the perpetual protection of the final revelation.[2] Yet it was not the Qur'ān but the Prophet's Sunna that would be the great item of contention in debates over authenticity among Muslims. The Sunni study of ḥadīths emerged from a widespread recognition that countless ḥadīths were being falsely attributed to the Prophet,[3] and the *raison d'être* of the science of ḥadīth criticism was "sorting the sound ḥadīths from the weak."[4]

It therefore seems stridently dissonant that, even after the authentic wheat had been separated from the chaff, mainstream Sunni scholars from Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) explicitly permitted using unreliable ḥadīths provided they did not pertain strictly to the core topics of law or dogma and were not unquestionably forgeries.[5] How could such an approach coexist with a stated devotion to

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1) Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. Jamāl Thābit and Muḥammad Maḥmūd, 5 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1419/1998), 2:108.

2) Qur'ān 2:75, 15:9.

3) Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776) is quoted as saying that three-fourths of the ḥadīths he came across were forgeries; Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa ādāb al-sāmiʿ*, ed. Muḥammad Raʾfat Saʿīd, 2 vols. (Mansoura: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1423/2002), 2:307.

4) *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: introduction, *bāb wujūb al-riwāya ʿan al-thiqāt*; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ismāʿīl Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī, *Sharḥ al-ḥadīth al-muntaqā fī mabʿath al-nabī al-muṣṭafā*, ed. Jamāl ʿAzzūn (Sharja: Maktabat al-ʿUmarayn al-ʿIlmiyya, 1420/1999), 45-46.

5) James Robson, "Ḥadīth," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2009; Brill Online) (henceforth

authenticity or with the dictate, phrased in a much-cited Prophetic ḥadīth, that "Whoever narrates a ḥadīth from me that he sees is a lie then he is among the liars"?[6]

In light of this seeming contradiction, it should not surprise us that the picture is much more complex than first appears. When we scan the full depth and breadth of the Sunni ḥadīth tradition we see that the practice of accepting weak ḥadīths was not uniformly accepted by all. It was contested across the centuries by a number of leading Muslim scholars who sensed its incompatibility with the core commitment to textual authenticity. Nor was the majority group of Sunni scholars who espoused the selective use of weak ḥadīths oblivious to its ideological inconsistencies. They understood that arguments were required to reconcile using unreliable ḥadīths with the overarching values of Islamic thought.

This article traces the various stances and schools of thought on the use of weak and forged ḥadīths in Sunni Islam from the third/ninth century until the present day. The different stances reflect the various priorities of scholars as well as their contrasting conceptions of truth. Did the pedagogical duty of Muslim scholars to improve the practice

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*EI*²); Jonathan P. Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 76; Michael Lecker, "Wāqidī's Account on the Status of the Jews of Medina: a Study of a Combined Report," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 54, no. 1 (1995): 23-4. Newby notes the same laxity towards reports of miracles proving Muḥammad's prophethood; Gordon Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet* (Colombia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 14. Several Arabic-language studies have been produced on the subject of using weak ḥadīths, such as Ashraf Saʿīd's *Ḥukm al-ʿamal bi'l-ḥadīth al-ḍaʿīf fī faḍā'il al-aʿmāl* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1412/1992) and Māhir ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *al-Ḥadīth al-ḍaʿīf asbābuhu wa aḥkāmuhu* (Mansoura: Dār al-Yaqīn, 1423/2002). By far the most useful is ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Khuḍayr's *al-Ḥadīth al-ḍaʿīf wa ḥukm al-iḥtijāj bihi* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Minhāj, 1425/2005). The Yemeni scholar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Muʿallimī (d. 1966) mentioned that he had a book on the subject in draft form; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Muʿallimī, *al-Anwār al-kāshifa li-mā fī kitāb Aḍwā' ʿalā al-sunna min al-zalal wa'l-taḍlīl wa'l-mujāzafa* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1405/1985), 91. In addition, the Moroccan traditionalist polymath ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī (d. 1993) stated that he intended to devote a work to the subject, as has Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr. I have not found any indication that any of these works have appeared in published form; ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī, *al-Ḥāwī fī al-fatāwā,* ed. Ibrāhīm Aḥmad Shiḥḥāta (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li'l-Turāth, [n.d.]), 131; Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, *Manhaj al-naqd fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, 28th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʿāṣir, 1428/2007), 294.

6) *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: introduction, *bāb wujūb al-riwāya ʿan al-thiqāt*….

of the masses justify using effective stories even if they were not factually true? Or should Muslim scholars prioritize the authenticity of the Prophet's teachings as a body of literal truth regardless of any limitations this might place on pietistic utility? What were the social and ideological consequences of choosing between these priorities? Muslims have debated these questions within their own diachronic republic of letters from the third/ninth century until today.

In the pre-modern period, the acceptance of unreliable ḥadīths was the dominant position among Sunni scholars. Only a small cadre of scholars rooted in the Ḥanbalī schools of Baghdad and Damascus protested. They cited as their objections the 'heretical' religious innovations excused by unreliable ḥadīths, how using them betrayed the scholarly responsibility to preserve the Shariah in its pure form, and the concomitant corruption of the public's ability to assign the proper moral weight to actions.

In the early-modern and modern periods, objections to the selective use of weak ḥadīths intensified with two unprecedented phenomena. First, influential eighteenth-century revivalist scholars placed scriptural authenticity at the forefront of their clarion call for a return to the authentic ways of the Salaf. Second, modernist rationalism and concern over practices deemed superstitious made Islamic modernists like Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) sensitive to the impact of weak ḥadīths on the compatibility of Islam with the modern world. Moreover, Orientalist historical criticism made Muslim scholars aware of the extrinsic consequences of the acceptance of unreliable ḥadīths on the defensibility of their worldview. Conversely, modern defenders of the classical, premodern Sunni tradition upheld its hallmark laxity on unreliable ḥadīths as part of a resistence to reformist movements.

Corroborated Ḥadīths and Non-Prophetic Material

It has already been noted that in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries Muslim jurists from the *ahl al-ḥadīth* derived legal rulings from ḥadīths that did not live up to their accepted standards of *isnād* authenticity.[7]

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[7] See Jonathan Brown, "Did the Prophet Say it or Not?: Literal, Historical and Effective Truth in the Sunni Ḥadīth Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 2

Ahl al-ḥadīth scholars like Ibn Ḥanbal and Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889) did not consider this practice a betrayal of their commitment to adhering closely to the authentic Sunna of the Prophet. Rather, they accepted ḥadīths with lackluster *isnād*s because the reports either had other *isnād*s bolstering them, were backed up by the accepted practice of respected jurists or because there was no other textual evidence on that legal issue. These are not the species of ḥadīths that we are concerned with here, since *ahl al-ḥadīth* jurists believed that these ḥadīths were in fact reliable representations of the Prophet's Sunna (or at least the most reliable evidence for which one could hope).

Nor are we addressing the transmitted material that we so often find in ḥadīth books but which are not themselves reports attributed to the Prophet. Ibn ʿAdī (d. 365/975-6) reported that Ibn Ḥanbal stated that "three types of books have no bases (*uṣūl*) [as reports from the Prophet]: works on the campaigns of the Prophet and the early conquests (*maghāzī*), apocalyptic reports (*malāḥim*), and Qur'ānic glosses (*tafsīr*)."[8] The term *uṣūl* here is ambiguous, but later scholars like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) interpreted the statement as meaning that most reports in these three genres either had *isnād*s that did not originate with the Prophet or had no *isnād*s at all.[9] Indeed, if we open a book such as the *Kitāb al-fitan* of Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/842) we find that most of its apocalyptic contents are ascribed to the Companions ʿAbdallāh b. Salām, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAmr

(2009): 276 ff. Many of the ḥadīths used in the books of substantive law by the Sunni schools are not *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the standards of Sunni ḥadīth critics. Hence, we find the Shāfiʿī legal scholar Ḥamd al-Khaṭṭābī's (d. 388/998) stating that most of the ḥadīths used by jurists are only *ḥasan* in their rating; Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd al-Khaṭṭābī, *Maʿālim al-sunan*, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, 1401/1981), 1:6. The Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343) compiled a book listing the weak or baseless ḥadīths frequently cited by jurists. See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Maqdisī, *Majmūʿ rasāʾil al-ḥāfiẓ Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī*, ed. Ḥusayn b. ʿAkkāsha (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha, 1427/2006), 89-112. This may be the same work that ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī refers to as *al-Miʿyār* by an unknown 8th/14th-century author, although al-Ghumārī feels that the author is Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401); ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī, *al-Istiṣqāʾ li-adillat taḥrīm al-istimnāʾ* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1972), 38.

8) Abū Aḥmad ʿAbdallāh Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍuʿafāʾ al-rijāl*, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1405/1985), 1:128; al-Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ*, 2:195.

9) Al-Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ*, 2:195; Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-fatāwā*, ed. Sayyid Ḥusayn al-ʿAffānī and Khayrī Saʿīd, 35 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfīqiyya, [n.d.]), 13:196 (from the *Muqaddimat al-tafsīr*).

b. al-ʿĀṣ, or to the prominent early Jewish convert to Islam Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. *ca.* 32/652). Similarly, the majority of early *tafsīr* reports consisted of sayings from early scholarly figures such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687-8) or Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722).

Muslim ḥadīth critics were thus consciously lax in sifting through these reports, eager to preserve any material that was not of great consequence but still might be useful in providing details or filling in interpretive gaps. Al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) cites the seminal ḥadīth critic Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198/813) as prescribing, "Be lax in taking *tafsīr* reports from people that you would not trust in [Prophetic] ḥadīths," giving as examples al-Layth b. Abī Sulaym (d. 143/760-1), Ḍaḥḥāk b. al-Muzāḥim (d. 105/723) and Muḥammad b. al-Sāʾib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763). Al-Qaṭṭān explains that "those are not praised for their ḥadīths, but their *tafsīr* should be written down."[10] These reports were seen as separate genres from the legal ḥadīths with full *isnād*s (*musnadāt*), which al-Khaṭīb calls "the source of the Shariah from which legal rulings are derived."[11]

An Early (Near) Consensus

So far we have discussed ḥadīths that suffered from flawed *isnād*s but whose reliability nonetheless enjoyed some form of buttressing. By the mid third/ninth century, however, a near consensus had emerged

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10) Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Qalʿajī, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1405/1985), 1:36-7.

11) "*Aṣl al-sharīʿa wa minhā yustafādu al-aḥkām*"; al-Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ*, 2:216. Al-Khaṭīb admits that *tafsīr* reports include *aḥkām* material and can affect legal rulings. But he says that in cases in which scholars rely on less than reliable transmitters (for example, those whose memory or consistency have been impugned), they are only accessing their information on the readings of the Qurʾān, not their legal (*musnad*) material; ibid., 2:220. For example, Sufyān b. ʿUyayna kept a copy of Muqātil b. Sulaymān's *Tafsīr* with him. When he was asked why he used the work of this controversial figure, Sufyān replied that he did not transmit *tafsīr* reports through Muqātil but that "I use it as supplementary indication (*astadillu*) and seek help from it (*astaʿīnu*)"; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1417/1997), 13:164 (bio of Muqātil); cf. Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil*, 6:2422 (here the editor reads *siyar* instead of *tafsīr*). For examples of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) and Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī (d. 264/878) distinguishing between *musnadāt* and *tafsīr* reports, see al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 6:350 (bio of Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh), 7:194 (bio of Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad), 13:432 (bio of Abū Maʿshar al-Sindī).

among *ahl al-ḥadīth* scholars that even ḥadīths with weak *isnād*s and no buttressing could be used as long as they did not directly concern legal rulings (*aḥkām*).

Sunni ḥadīth critics and jurists of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries advocated relaxing authenticity requirements for topics such as manners (*adab*, *raqā'iq*) or exhortatory (*targhīb*) and dissuasive (*tarhīb*) homiletics. One genre in which much license was granted was 'the virtues of actions (*faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*)', or descriptions of what sort of reward or punishment awaited certain deeds in the Afterlife. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014) quotes the formative Basran ḥadīth critic ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī (d. 198/814) as stating:

> If reports are related to us from the Prophet concerning rulings and what is licit and prohibited, we are severe with the *isnād*s and we criticize the transmitters. But if we are told reports dealing with the virtues of actions (*faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*), their rewards and punishments [in the Afterlife], permissible things or pious invocations, we are lax with the *isnād*s.[12]

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī's student, the famous Ibn Ḥanbal, held the same position.[13]

Ahl al-ḥadīth scholars did not advocate using ḥadīths they *knew* were forged for such purposes or espouse a reliance on *isnād*s with proven liars in them. As Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938) explains in his formative *Introduction* (*Taqdima*), the lackluster material used for instilling "goodly manners (*al-ādāb al-jamīla*, *raqā'iq*)" and "exhortatory preaching (*mawāʿiẓ*, *targhīb wa tarhīb*)" still had to come from

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12) Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, 4 vols. (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1917-1925), 1:490-1 (*kitab al-duʿā' wa'l-takbīr*); al-Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ*, 2:134. A similar statement is also attributed to Sufyān al-Thawrī; Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil*, 1:160.

13) Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Kifāya fī uṣūl ʿilm al-riwāya*, ed. Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā al-Dimyāṭī, 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Hudā, 1423/2003), 1:399. The relatively late attestations for this quote from Ibn Ḥanbal are corroborated by his treatment of certain transmitters in his *ʿilal* and *rijāl* works. For example, Ibn Ḥanbal said of al-Naḍr b. Ismāʿīl al-Bajalī that "we have written [ḥadīths] from him, but he is not strong. His ḥadīths are considered, but only in *raqā'iq*"; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-ʿIlal wa maʿrifat al-rijāl*, ed. Waṣī Allāh ʿAbbās (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1408/1988), 126; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 13:436. It is reported that Ibn Ḥanbal placed Ibn Isḥāq in this category; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Ḥadītha, 1977), 1:17; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Rajab, *Sharḥ ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, 2 vols. ([n.p.]: [n.p.], 1398/1978), 1:74.

transmitters who were "sincere (*ṣadūq*)," although they might err frequently. Of course, no such material could be used in law.[14]

Ahl al-ḥadīth scholars considered matters of legal rulings to be a special preserve of critical stringency. Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) said that only transmitters well-known for their knowledge of the specific details of ḥadīths can be cited for "the licit and prohibited." "For other than that [topic,]" however, "there is no problem [with taking] from normal teachers (*al-mashāyikh*)."[15] Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) states in his *Risāla* that "ḥadīths on what is permitted and prohibited are the loftiest of matters and the most unworthy of any kind of uncertainty (*ẓinna*)."[16]

This theory seems to have been borne out in practice. The one third/ninth-century ḥadīth collector who consistently rated the reliability of his ḥadīth selections, al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), provides us a glimpse of how a ḥadīth critic treated different topics. In the legal chapters on tithing (*zakāt*) in his *Jāmiʿ*, al-Tirmidhī describes only 17% of the ḥadīths as suffering from some lack of corroboration (*gharāba*). His chapter on fasting (*ṣawm*) includes 17% as well, and his chapter on inheritance (*farāʾiḍ*) only 7%. The chapters on non-legal matters show a marked increase in the percentage of ḥadīths that al-Tirmidhī himself acknowledges as problematic: apocalyptic strifes (*fitan*)—35%; the virtues of various early Muslims (*manāqib*)—52%; pious invocations (*daʿwāt*)—50%; and manners (*ādāb*) 27%.

The advantage of this laxity in criticizing ḥadīths used for the virtues of actions and exhortatory/dissuasive preaching was that it allowed for employing more colorful and affective reports. As we have discussed elsewhere, it was the 'effective truth' and pedagogical utility of such ḥadīths that made their use so appealing.[17] A ḥadīth stating that "There are seventy-(three) types of usury (*ribā*), the least of which is equivalent

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14) Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Taqdima* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1371/1952), 6. This position is attributed to Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797); idem, *al-Jarḥ wa'l- taʿdīl*, 6 vols. (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1360-72/1941-53), 2:30-31; cf. Ibn Rajab, *Sharḥ ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī*, 1:73.

15) Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil*, 1:160; al-Khaṭīb, *al-Kifāya*, 1:398.

16) Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, [n.d.]), 394.

17) Brown, "Did the Prophet Say it or Not," 279 ff.

to a man having sex with his mother" was criticized in its various permutations, but both Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887) and al-Ḥākim included it in their widely-respected compilations.[18] The utility of this report for condemning usury can easily be imagined. An appreciation for such pedagogical utililty is clear in Ibn Ḥanbal's remark about popular preachers in general: "How useful they are to the masses, even if the mass of what they narrate is untrue."[19]

Mainstream Institutional Sunnism

The general acceptance of weak ḥadīths in areas not directly related to law, and especially in the virtues of actions, continued as Sunni Islam

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[18] Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*: *kitāb al-tijārāt*, *bāb al-taghlīz fī al-ribā* (from Abū Hurayra → Saʿīd al-Maqburī); al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, 2:37 (from Ibn Masʿūd → Masrūq). Various narrations of the ḥadīth were criticized in: Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAmr al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-ḍuʿafāʾ al-kabīr*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Amīn Qalʿajī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1404/1984), 2:257-8; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *ʿIlal al-ḥadīth*, ed. Saʿd ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥumayyid and Khālid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Juraysī (Riyadh: Maṭābiʿ al-Juraysī, 2006), 3:614 (#1132). It was considered an outright forgery by many scholars; Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ʿUthmān, 3 vols. (Medina: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1386-88/1966-68), 2:245; ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿArrāq, *Tanzīh al-sharīʿa al-marfūʿa ʿan al-akhbār al-shanīʿa al-mawḍūʿa* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, [1964]), 2:194; Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Fatanī, *Tadhkirat al-mawḍūʿāt* (Beirut: Amīn Damaj, [1960]), 139. Al-Suyūṭī considered it reliable; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Laʾālī al-maṣnūʿa fī al-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa*, ed. Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad al-ʿUwayḍa, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1417/1996), 2:129. Al-Albānī considers it *ṣaḥīḥ*; Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa*, 7 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1415-22/1995-2002), 4:488 ff. (#1871). Cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Zawājir ʿan iqtirāf al-kabāʾir*, ed. ʿImād Zakī al-Bārūdī (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfīqiyya, 2003), 1:494-6; cf. Abū Bakr Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt, 7 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1409/[1989]), 4:448; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī, 2nd ed., 11 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1403/[1983]), 8:314; cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Bulūgh al-marām min adillat al-aḥkām*, ed. Abū Muʿādh Ṭāriq b. ʿAwaḍ Allāh (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1429/2008), 298. Interestingly, the maverick Shāfiʿī scholar al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) stated that he had not found evidence sufficient to declare *ribā* a grave sin (*kabīra*); Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥalw and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Hujr, 1413/1992), 8:249.

[19] "*Mā anfaʿahum liʾl-ʿāmma wa in kāna ʿāmmat mā yuḥaddithūn bihi kadhibᵃⁿ*"; Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 2 vols. in 1 (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Anwār al-Muḥammadiyya, [n.d.]), 1:151.

matured into its institutional form in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries.

One of the earliest authors of systematic treatises on the science of ḥadīth, the Khurasani scholar al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, cites the above report of Ibn Mahdī on laxity in *isnād*s as the "method (*madhhab*)" he will follow in presenting ḥadīths in his chapter on pious invocations (*duʿā'*) and supererogatory praising of God (*al-tasbīḥ*) in his voluminous ḥadīth collection *al-Mustadrak*.[20]

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, who picked up the mantle of al-Ḥākim's work and established the foundations for the Sunni ḥadīth sciences, includes a chapter on "Strictness in Legal Ḥadīths and Laxity in the Virtues of Actions" in his *al-Kifāya fī uṣūl ʿilm al-riwāya*, in which he presents the reports of early Sunnis like Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 196/811) and Ibn Ḥanbal affirming this policy. He writes, "It has been quoted from many of the Righteous Forbearers (*salaf*) that it is not permitted to transmit ḥadīths concerning permissibility and prohibition except from those who are free of accusation, far from suspicion." "But as for the ḥadīths of exhortatory preaching (*targhīb*), homelitics (*mawāʿiẓ*) and similar things," he adjoins, "it is allowed to record them from the other transmitters."[21]

Writing in Lisbon at the same time as al-Khaṭīb, the great Mālikī[22] ḥadīth scholar Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1070) notes criticism of a ḥadith concerning the forgiveness of sins at Hajj: on the Day of ʿArafa God forgives the pilgrims, on the night of Muzdalifa the merchants, on the day of Minā the camel drivers, and anyone who seeks forgiveness at the last pillar for stoning the Devil. Although Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr admits that this ḥadīth is narrated at one point only by an unknown transmitter,

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20) Al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, 1:490-1.

21) Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Kifāya*, 1:398; cf. idem, *Jāmiʿ*, 2:133.

22) Another outstanding Mālikī ḥadīth scholar of the seventh/thirteenth century, Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Fāsī (d. 628/1231) of Marrakesh, is also quoted as allowing the use of weak ḥadīths in the virtues of actions but not in law. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī provides a quotation to this effect from Ibn al-Qaṭṭān's *Bayān al-wahm wa'l-īhām al-wāqiʿayn fī kitāb al-Aḥkām*. However, neither I nor Muṣṭafā Abū Sufyān, who inspected all the printed editions and available manuscripts of the *Bayān*, have been able to find this quote in the book; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Nukat ʿalā kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*, ed. Masʿūd ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-ʿAdafī and Muḥammad Fāris (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, [1414/1994]), 126; Muṣṭafā Abū Sufyān, *Ārā' Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Fāsī fī ʿulūm muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth* (Rabat: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif al-Jadīda, 2002), 24.

generally a fatal flaw in terms of reliability, he explains that "the People of Knowledge continue to be permissive (*yatasāmiḥūn anfusahum*) in narrating [reports on] pious wishes (*al-raghā'ib*) and virtues (*al-faḍā'il*) from anyone. They were strict only on ḥadīths dealing with legal rulings."[23]

One of al-Ḥākim's acolytes in eastern Iran, the great Shāfiʿī scholar Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, repeats Ibn Mahdī's approach to weak ḥadīths in his work on the proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood (*Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*). Al-Bayhaqī explains that there are two types of weak ḥadīths. The first species, those narrated by individuals known for forgery, are not used for any purpose. The second type, those deemed unreliable due to less serious flaws such as a transmitter suffering from a lackluster command of his material (*ḥifẓ*), cannot be used in law but can be employed in *tafsīr*, exhortatory preaching and detailing the campaigns of the early Muslim community (*maghāzī*).[24] In fact, in the unmatched volume of books that al-Bayhaqī produced, many of them ḥadīth collections, he regularly included ḥadīths dismissed as unreliable by leading ḥadīth critics.[25] In his collection of reports on the branches of faith (*Shuʿab al-īmān*), al-Bayhaqī reiterates that "the scholars of ḥadīth have been lax (*tasāhala*) in accepting what has appeared concerning pious invocations and the virtues of actions as long as no one in the *isnād* was a known forger."[26]

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23) Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd li-mā fī al-Muwaṭṭa' min al-maʿānī wa'l-asānīd*, ed. Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Bakrī, 2nd ed., 26 vols. ([Rabat]: Wizārat ʿUmūm al-Awqāf wa'l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1402/1982), 1:127.

24) Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*; 1:33-34, 36-7.

25) This has been the cause of great argument. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī argued that al-Bayhaqī had stated explicitly that he never included forged ḥadīths in any of his books. As a result, al-Suyūṭī treated any ḥadīth drawn from al-Bayhaqī's works as 'weak (*ḍaʿīf*)' at worst. Later scholars, like the Indian Ẓafar Aḥmad al-Tahānawī (d. 1974), acted on al-Suyūṭī's cue. This has occasioned criticism of al-Suyūṭī from the modern Moroccan ḥadīth scholar Aḥmad b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī (d. 1960), who stated that in reality al-Bayhaqī "includes forged ḥadīths in great numbers" in his works; al-Suyūṭī, *al-La'ālī al-maṣnūʿa*, 1:19; Ẓafar Aḥmad al-Tahānawī, *Qawāʿid fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 3rd ed. (Aleppo: Maktab al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1392/1972), 111-114; Aḥmad al-Ghumārī, *al-Mughīr ʿalā al-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa fī al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Rā'id al-ʿArabī, 1402/1982), 9.

26) Al-Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-īmān*, ed. Muḥammad Saʿīd Basyūnī Zaghlūl, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), 2:372.

This stance received its most authoritive stamp in the famous ḥadīth manual of the Damascene scholar Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (who adds an extra emphasis prohibiting the use of weak ḥadīths in matters of creed as well) and in the landmark work of the most influential scholar of the next generation, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277).[27] In his famous commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, al-Nawawī explains that ḥadīth scholars have allowed laxity on matters other than legal rulings (*aḥkām*) because these ḥadīths "have sound bases (*uṣūl ṣaḥīḥa*) established in the holy law (*al-sharʿ*), known to its scholars."[28]

In his widely-copied and now widely-published collection of pietistic invocations drawn from ḥadīths, *al-Adhkār*, al-Nawawī affirms that one can act on weak ḥadīths as long as they are not clearly forged and concern non-legal matters like the virtues of actions. In fact, al-Nawawī encourages people to act on any ḥadīth they encounter on the virtues of actions: "Know that it is incumbent on whomever hears something from the virtues of actions to act on it at least once so that [the promised reward] can apply to him… based on the saying of the Prophet (ṣ) in the ḥadīth, its authenticity agreed upon, 'If I ordered something for you then do what you can of it…."

Interestingly, al-Nawawī introduces a new notion as well: that one can act on weak ḥadīths even on issues of law provided that this action stems from a private desire for supererogatory obedience—"if in that one is being cautious." For example, if a weak ḥadīth discourages certain types of sales or marriage, then one can refrain from engaging in these out of piety.[29]

The mainstream Sunni position of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Nawawī was echoed by leading Shāfiʿī scholars of the Late Sunni Tradition: their contemporary in Baghdad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258) in his famous *al-Targhīb wa al-tarhīb*, the Damascene compiler Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), the Cairene ḥadīth scholar Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404), the Damascene Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn

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27) Abū ʿAmr Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ,* ed. ʿĀ'isha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1411/1990), 286.

28) Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1407/1987), 1:240.

29) Al-Nawawī, *al-Adhkār al-muntakhab min kalām sayyid al-abrār* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1420/1999), 7-8.

(d. 842/1438), the argumentative Cairene al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480) in his defense of Muslims using material drawn from the Bible, the leading Meccan jurist Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 974/1566), and his peer among the leading authorities in Shāfiʿī law, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459).[30] The greatest defender of this position was no less a figure than Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who reiterated al-Nawawī's position that one can act even on weak ḥadīths in matters of law "if it is done out of caution."[31] He reminds us that, like the purview of *maghāzī*, weak ḥadīths are also acceptable in matters of history and *sīra*. He thus justifies employing them as his chief exhibit of evidence that the parents of the Prophet attained Paradise despite dying before the coming of Islam.[32]

Leading Ḥanafī scholars of the Late Sunni Tradition also espoused the standard Sunni stance, adding the clause that an action can be declared legally recommended (*mustaḥabb*), but not required, on the basis of weak ḥadīths. The prominent Egyptian Ḥanafī jurist Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn Humām (d. 861/1457) asserts the recommended status of performing ablutions after carrying an enshrouded body for burial. He bases this on a ḥadīth that he acknowledges is considered weak by most

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30) ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm b. ʿAbd al-Qawī al-Mundhirī and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Muntaqā min kitāb al-Targhīb wa al-tarhīb* (Cairo: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1413/1993), 1:96; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, vol. 6, ed. Shuʿayb Arnāʾūṭ and Ḥusayn Asad (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1419/1998), 6:184; Zayn al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-ʿIrāqī, *al-Tabṣira waʾl-tadhkira*, 3 vols. in 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, [n.d.], reprint of the 1353/[1935] Fez edition, edited by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-ʿIrāqī al-Ḥusaynī), 1:291; Walid Saleh, "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqāʿī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qurʾān," *Speculum* 83 (2008): 646, 650; idem, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and Introduction to al-Biqāʿī's Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Muḥammad Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, *al-Tarjīḥ li-ḥadīth ṣalāt al-tasbīḥ*, ed. Maḥmūd Saʿīd Mamdūḥ (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1405/1985), 36; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *Fatḥ al-mubīn li-sharḥ al-Arbaʿīn*, ed. Ḥasan al-Mudābighī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1398/1978), 28, 32; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Qalyūbī wa ʿUmayra sharḥ Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qalyūbī wa ʿUmayra ʿalā sharḥ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī ʿalā Minhāj al-ṭālibīn*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, [1981]), 1:56.

31) Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAbd al-Laṭīf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turāth, 1426/2005), 230.

32) Al-Suyūṭī, "al-Taʿẓīm waʾl-manna fī anna abaway Rasūl Allāh fī al-janna," *Silsilat Maṭbūʿāt Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya* 50 (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1334/[1915]), 2.

scholars. He rejoins, however, that "legally recommended status (*al-istiḥbāb*) can be established by a weak ḥadīth provided that it is not forged."[33] The great Ḥanafī champion of Mecca, Mullā ʿAlī al-Qāri' (d. 1014/1606) states that weak ḥadīths "are acted on in the virtues of actions by consensus." Like Ibn Humām, he holds that this entails the permissibility of declaring an action recommended (*mustaḥabb*) on the basis of weak ḥadīths.[34]

The Ḥanafī scholar responsible for transporting the intensive study of ḥadīth from the Hejaz to India, the Indian ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī (d. 1052/1642), upheld the standard Late Sunni position of al-Nawawī.[35] The lexicographer and Indian immigrant to Cairo Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791 CE) did as well.[36] Although not a noted jurist in his own right, the Ottoman intellectual Kātib Chelebī (d. 1067/1657) strikes a similar tone in his fascinating treatise *Mīzān al-ḥaqq fī ikhtiyār al-aḥaqq*. He advises preachers giving the Friday sermons that "[t]here is no harm in relating weak traditions that may not be canonically authentic."[37]

A number of prominent scholars from the *sui generis* world of Yemeni Zaydism and Zaydī converts to Sunnism also upheld the mainstream Sunni position. Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1426) of Sana'a followed Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ in his manual on the ḥadīth sciences, repeating the standard stance on using weak ḥadīths outside of legal or creedal issues (such as God's attributes).[38] The leading Zaydī scholar of his day, Ṣārim al-Dīn

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33) Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Ibn Humām, *Fatḥ al-qadīr*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1389/1970), 2:133 (*faṣl fi ḥaml al-janāza*). Ibn Ḥanbal is reported to have said that there are no reliable ḥadīths to this effect; Ibn Ḥajar, *Bulūgh al-marām*, 73.

34) In his massive ḥadīth commentary, the *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ*, Mullā ʿAlī qualifies his position by stating that using a weak ḥadīth is allowed only if it does not contradict *ḥasan* or *ṣaḥīḥ* ḥadīths; Mullā ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Qāri', *al-Asrār al-marfūʿa fī al-akhbār al-mawḍūʿa*, ed. Muḥammad Luṭfī Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1406/1986), 305; idem, *Mirqāt al-mafātiḥ*, ed. Jamāl ʿAyṭānī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), 2:206.

35) ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawī, *Muqaddima*, ed. Sulaymān al-Ḥusayn al-Nadwī (Lucknow: Dār al-ʿUlūm li-Nadwat al-ʿUlamā', [1984]), 87-88.

36) Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Bulghat al-arīb fī muṣṭalaḥ āthār al-ḥabīb*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 2nd ed. (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1408/1988, addended to *Qafw al-athar fī ṣafw ʿulūm al-athar*), 190.

37) Kātib Chelebī, *The Balance of Truth*, trans. G.L. Lewis (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), 148.

38) Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Wazīr, *Tanqīḥ al-anẓār fī maʿrifat ʿulūm al-āthār*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣubḥī Ḥallāq and ʿĀmir Ḥusayn (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1420/1999), 185-

al-Wazīrī (d. 914/1508), states that Muslim ḥadīth critics must be impartial and stringent in reports on legal rulings, "as opposed to ḥadīths on virtues; with them one can be somewhat forgiving."[39] The Indian Ocean trader and scholar Muḥammad Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 1931) was an odd confessional amalgam, whose veneration of the Family of the Prophet blurred the lines between Sunnism and Shiism. He notes in his critique of Sunni treatment of advocates of the Prophet's family that Sunni scholars claim to be lax in dealing with ḥadīths on virtues of individuals as opposed to *aḥkām*, but they are ruthlessly critical of ḥadīths on the virtues of the Family of the Prophet.[40]

Reconciling Dissonance in the Mainstream Sunni Position

It is important to emphasize that no Sunni scholar permitted, under any circumstances, the use of a ḥadīth he *acknowledged* to be a patent forgery.[41] The Prophet had clearly stated in a revered ḥadīth that

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6; idem, *al-Rawḍ al-bāsim fī l-dhabb ʿan sunnat Abī al-Qāsim* (Sanaa: al-Maktaba al-Yamaniyya, 1985), 127.

39) Ṣārim al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Wazīrī, *al-Falak al-dawwār fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth wa'l-fiqh wa'l-āthār*, ed. Muḥammad Yaḥyā ʿAzzān (Ṣaʿda: Maṭbaʿat al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1415/1994), 22.

40) Muḥammad Ibn ʿAqīl al-Ḥaḍramī, *al-ʿAtb al-jamīl ʿalā ahl al-jarḥ wa'l-taʿdīl*, ed. Ḥasan al-Saqqāf (Amman: Dār al-Imām al-Nawawī, 1425/2004), 159.

41) A contrary idea, that 'even if it's not true it's true,' was upheld by the enigmatic Sufi al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 285/898-318/930) in his *Nawādir al-uṣūl*. He accepts the attribution of truth or guidance to the Prophet even if he did not say them. The Prophet, he explains, preceded the person presenting such teachings with the same message, in its *aṣl* if not in the details. "So if what is said is right and acceptable to those acquainted with truth, then it is a saying of the Messenger (ṣ), whether he really said it or not, and we must believe it." This is based on a controversial ḥadīth, appearing in its earliest known form in al-Ḥakīm's book: *idhā ḥuddithtum ʿannī bi-ḥadīth yuwāfiqu al-ḥaqq fa-ṣaddiqūhu wa khudhū bihi, ḥaddathtu bihi aw lam uḥaddith*." This ḥadīth is universally rejected as extremely weak or forged by Sunnis, including al-ʿUqaylī (d. 323/934), al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995), Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Dhahabī, al-Shawkānī, and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997). See al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣul*, ed. Aḥmad al-Sāyiḥ and al-Sayyid al-Jamīl, 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Rayyān, 1988), 1:351, 361; Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasana*, ed. Muḥammad al-Khisht (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1405/2004), 48; al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafāʾ al-kabīr*, 1:32-3; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, 1:258; ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, 8 vols. in 2 (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Imtiyāz, 1398/1978), 2:251; al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī*

"Whover lies about me intentionally, let him prepare for himself a seat in Hellfire."[42]

This unequivocal ban on using 'forged' ḥadīths, however, had little practical consequence. The category of 'forgery (*waḍʿ*)' represented only the far end of the spectrum of ḥadīth unreliability, and there was no consistent distinction between ḥadīths considered 'forged' and 'weak' ḥadīths.[43] Ratings differed considerably between scholars; the above-mentioned ḥadīth equating usury with incest was considered a forgery by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), Ibn ʿArrāq (d. 963/1556) and others but authentic by al-Ḥākim. Even if a scholar had substantial doubts about whether the Prophet had said a statement, he might still only consider the ḥadīth 'weak' and thus within the purview of application.

Furthermore, in Sunni ḥadīth discourse after the 400s/1000s, in order to raise a ḥadīth from the status of 'forged (*mawḍūʿ*)' to that of 'weak (*ḍaʿīf*)', all a scholar had to do was present an argument that it had some 'basis (*aṣl*)' from the Prophet. This was accomplished by locating one narration that could be rated as merely 'weak', often by buttressing it with other weak narrations or with the corroboration of Companion opinions.[44] Although the ḥadīth "Wiping one's neck

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naqd al-rijāl, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, [n.d.], reprint of 1963-4 Cairo ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī edition), 1:265; 3:547; Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, *al-Fawāʾid al-majmūʿa fī al-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Muʿallimī and Zuhayr Shāwīsh, 2nd ed. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1392/[1972]), 280-82; ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *Lamaḥāt min tārīkh al-sunna wa ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Maktab al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1404/1984), 87. Interestingly, Ibn Mājah included a similar ḥadīth in the introduction of his *Sunan* but seemingly intending it to be understood as magnifying the Prophet's words rather than as al-Ḥakīm suggested: "*lā aʿrifanna mā yuḥaddathu aḥadakum ʿannī al-ḥadīth wa huwa muttakiʾ ʿalā arīkatihi fa-yaqūlu iqraʾ qurʾānan mā qīl min qawl ḥasan fa-anā qultuhu*"; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*: *muqaddima*, bāb 2.

42) For clear condemnations of using material known to be forged, see al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:185-6; ʿImād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr and Aḥmad Shākir, *al-Bāʿith al-ḥathīth sharḥ Ikhtiṣār ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1423/2003), 66; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Bin Bāz and Ayman Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 14148/1997), 1:266.

43) As the famous ḥadīth scholar of Baghdad, ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258), noted, many scholars had included 'forged' ḥadīths under the rubric of 'weak' ones; al-Mundhirī, *al-Muntaqā*, 1:96.

44) Some scholars, like al-Mundhirī, did not believe that weak ḥadīths when grouped together could be considered reliable; al-Qārī', *Sharḥ sharḥ Nukhbat al-fikar* ([n.p.]: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 1392/1972), 71-2.

[during ablutions] is protection from fetters [on the Day of Judgment]" had commonly been rated a forgery and "not from the speech of the Prophet,"[45] Mullā ʿAlī al-Qāri' argued that it was only 'weak'. He pointed to a Companion statement with the same meaning in the works of Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/838). Moreover, he argued that a version of the ḥadīth existed in the *Musnad al-Firdaws* of al-Daylamī (d. 558/1163) that was 'weak' and not forged, so the ḥadīth was acceptable in the virtues of actions.[46] The ḥadīth "Askalon is one of the two queens, from which God will resurrect seventy thousand on the Day of Judgment with no account…" had been declared a forgery by numerous scholars, in part because it belonged to the suspect genre of ḥadīths chauvinistically praising certain cities.[47] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), however, argued that the problematic transmitter in the ḥadīth's *isnād* was not sufficiently unreliable to merit the rating of a forgery, and that the ḥadīth was thus admissible on the virtues of actions (or, in this case, of a place).[48]

One device for excusing the presentation of unreliable ḥadīths was providing its *isnād* as a certificate absolving the scholar from seeming to misrepresent the Prophet. From the time of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī onward, mainstream Sunni scholars held that one may include a dubious ḥadīth in one's works provided that one includes the ḥadīth's *isnād* for evaluation by the reader.[49] This shifted the responsibility of determining the ḥadīth's authenticity to the reader and served as Muslim scholars' chief tactic for reconciling their commitment to authenticity with their rampant collection of unreliable ḥadīths in works like *Musnad al-Firdaws*.

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45) Al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ḍaʿīfa wa'l-mawḍūʿa*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1420/2000), 1:167 ff. (#69).

46) Al-Qāri', *al-Asrār al-marfūʿa*, 305; Shīruwayh b. Shahrudār al-Daylamī, *Firdaws al-akhbār*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1418/1997), 2:244 (#5628).

47) Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Manār al-munīf fī al-ṣaḥīḥ wa'l-ḍaʿīf*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 12th ed. (Beirut: Maktab al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1425/2004), 117.

48) Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Qawl al-musaddad fī al-dhabb ʿan Musnad al-imām Aḥmad* (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1401/[1981]), 27.

49) Brown, "Did the Prophet Say it or Not?," 281-2.

Voices in the Wilderness

Allowing the use of weak ḥadīths outside of the areas of "prohibition and permissibility" was not upheld unanimously, nor were the dissenters from this mainstream position minor names by any means.

The most salient opponent of using weak ḥadīths for any purpose was none other than Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875).[50] In an introductory chapter of his famous *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim discusses the obligation to uncover flaws in ḥadīths and alert others to them. Ḥadīth scholars must commit themselves to this task due to their weighty responsibility of guiding the masses aright. He says about remaining silent on unreliable ḥadīths:

> There is great danger in this, since the reports concern the issue of religion. For indeed they contain permission, prohibition, affirmative and negative commands, exhortation and dissuasion (*targhīb wa tarhīb*). So if their narrator is not a mine of truth (*maʿdin li'l-ṣidq*) and trust, and then someone narrated it, knowing this [flaw], but did not clarify [that flaw] to others who were ignorant of this, he would be sinning in that act, cheating (*ghāshsh*^{an}) the masses of Muslims, since it is not certain that some who heard these reports would not act on them…."[51]

Unfortunately, we have no surviving statements from al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) on this issue.[52]

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50) This position is also attributed to the famous ḥadīth critic of Baghdad, Yaḥyā Ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/848), who Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 659/1261) notes rejected using weak ḥadīths in *aḥkām* and non-*aḥkām* equally; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 1:21. This attribution may result from a statement attributed to Ibn Maʿīn by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī: on the Day of Judgment "it would be preferable to me to have one of the people be my opponent for doubting him and setting him aside [as a transmitter] than to have my opponent be the Prophet, who would say, 'A ḥadīth reached you from me, and it struck your heart that it was an error, so why did you narrate it?'"; al-Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ*, 2:134. However, al-Khaṭīb's *Tārīkh Baghdād* also includes a statement attributed to Ibn Maʿīn that, when asked about the *maghāzī* scholar Abū Maʿshar al-Sindī (d. 170/787), he said "weak, but his ḥadīths on *riqāq* can be recorded. He was an illiterate person, and one should fear narrating his legal (*musnadāt*) ḥadīths"; al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 13:432 (bio of Abū Maʿshar).

51) *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: *muqaddima*, *bāb al-kashf ʿan maʿāyib*…. Interestingly, the modern scholar Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr claims that Muslim actually upheld the mainstream opinion allowing the use of weak ḥadīths; Ibn Rajab, *Sharḥ ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī*, 1:76.

52) Al-Bukhārī's surviving writings include no mention of his position on weak ḥadīths. The Yemeni scholar Ibn al-Wazīr reported that al-Bukhārī did not believe in acting on *ḥasan*

Truly a voice in the Andalusian wilderness, the maverick Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) also rejects using weak ḥadīths on any subject. He notes that some Muslims allow taking as evidence ḥadīths that have in their *isnād* someone criticized for forgery or heedlessness or whose standing is unknown (*majhūl al-ḥāl*), but that he does not allow this for any purpose.[53] The categorical rejection of using weak ḥadīths has also been incorrectly attributed to the famous traveler and Mālikī scholar of Marakkesh, Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1145).[54]

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or *ḍaʿīf* ḥadīths in matters of prohibition and permission; Ibn al-Wazīr, *Tanqīḥ al-anẓār*, 72. Later scholars held that al-Bukhārī categorically prohibited the use of weak ḥadīths (with no mention of *ḥasan* ḥadīths). This was reported by the Salafī scholar Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914) and the traditionalist Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (d. 1952); Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Qawāʿid al-taḥdīth fi funūn muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bayṭār (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1427/2006), 116; Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-Kawtharī* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1428/2008), 47. Other scholars like Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī concluded that al-Bukhārī had allowed using weak ḥadīths in matters other than law. He notes that perhaps al-Bukhārī included the ḥadīth "Be in this world as if you are a stranger (*kun fi al-dunyā kaʾannaka gharīb*) in his chapter on pious sensibility (*al-riqāq*) despite its solitary narration by an impugned transmitter because it was "as if al-Bukhārī were not strict on it because it is a ḥadīth of exhortation and dissuasion"; Ibn Ḥajar, *Hady al-sārī,* ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī and ʿAbdallāh Ibn Bāz (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1418/1997), 615. This conclusion was upheld by the modern ḥadīth scholar ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda; Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *Ẓafr al-amānī sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Maktab al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1410/1989), 185.

53) Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-milal waʾl-ahwāʾ waʾl-niḥal*, 5 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṣabīḥ, [1964]), 2:84.

54) His categorical rejection of using weak ḥadīths has been repeated in numerous sources; Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ al-mughīth bi-sharḥ Alfiyyat al-ḥadīth*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥusayn ʿAlī, 5 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1424/2003), 1:350. The Saudi scholar Dr. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Khuḍayr, however, has shown that Ibn al-ʿArabīʾs advice in his work *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* that his students study only *ṣaḥīḥ* ḥadīths is contradicted by one of his later writings, his commentary on al-Tirmidhīʾs *Jāmiʿ*, the*ʿĀriḍat al-aḥwadhī*. Discussing al-Tirmidhīʾs inclusion of an admittedly weak ḥadīth on the etiquette of praying for someone who has sneezed, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that "it is recommended that it be acted on because it is a prayer (*duʿāʾ*) for well-being"; al-Khuḍayr, *al-Ḥadīth al-ḍaʿīf*, 263 ff.; Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1387/1967), 2:580; idem, *ʿĀriḍat al-aḥwadhī*, 13 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, [1992]), 10:205, see also 5:201-2.

The School of Ibn al-Jawzī: Consequences and Ideals

The most conscientious acknowledgment of the social consequences of promulgating weak ḥadīths comes from Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). The leading Ḥanbalī scholar and preacher of Baghdad in his day, Ibn al-Jawzī was enmeshed in the religious life of the city and the masses who attended his lessons.[55] Concerns over irresponsible preachers, their use of unreliable stories and the heretical ideas they spread were powerful motives in Ibn al-Jawzī's writings. His collection of forged ḥadīths, the *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, was the most voluminous work of its kind yet produced. His later work on preachers and preaching, the *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa'l-mudhakkirīn*, laid out the proper guidelines for religious homelitics.[56] In his works, Ibn al-Jawzī vents his anxieties over the effects of unreliable ḥadīths on society, most specifically on people's ability to assign moral weight to actions:

> How many complexions have become yellow with hunger, and how many people fall asleep flat on their faces out of wandering in pious travel (*bi'l-siyāḥa*)? How many have forbidden to themselves what is permitted, and how many have abandoned the transmission of religious knowledge (*ʿilm*), claiming that they are resisting the desire of their souls to do so? How many a person has orphaned his children by asceticism while still alive, and how many have turned away from their wives, not fulfilling their obligations to them, leaving them neither single nor women with a master?![57]

These are not empty concerns, Ibn al-Jawzī reminds us; such cases of neglect would come before judges in court.[58]

Ibn al-Jawzī identifies the genre of exhortatory and dissuasive ḥadīths as the crux of this problem. Using weak or forged ḥadīths that promise outrageous rewards or punishments for actions "ruins the scales of the

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55) For an example of this, see Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R.J.C Broadhurst (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 229-33; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa'l-mudhakkirīn*, ed. Merlin Swartz (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1986), 147.

56) An apparently similar work, *Āfāt al-wuʿāẓ*, was written by another Iraqi scholar contemporary with Ibn al-Jawzī, Isḥāq b. Aḥmad al-Maghribī (d. 600/1203); al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā*, 8:127.

57) Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, 1:32.

58) Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ*, 113.

significance of actions (*yufsidu mawāzīn maqādīr al-aʿmāl*)."[59] He complains, for example, that some storytellers tell of a prayer called *Ṣalāt al-Khuṣamā*' (Prayer of Disputants) that nullifies all sins. "And there is nobody for whom this prayer does not make it a light matter to steal and then pray these two *rakʿa*s to remove what he has done."[60] The potential pedagogical benefit of such reports thus pales in comparison to their negative influence on the moral senses of the community.

In addition to this argument from consequence, Ibn al-Jawzī pursues a parallel line of argument: the idealistic responsibility of preventing 'lying about the Prophet of God.' Regarding a forged ḥadīth on the virtues of reading *Āyat al-Kursī*, Ibn al-Jawzī rebuts the defense that using it is done in a good cause. "A goodly usage must be legally legitimate (*mashrūʿ*), so if we know that it is a lie then its usage is no longer licit (*kharaja ʿan al-mashrūʿiyya*)."[61]

Ibn al-Jawzī also rails against scholars who transmitted unreliable ḥadīths and excused themselves merely by including the *isnād*s for the reader to evaluate on their own. This is absurdly irresponsible when dealing with the masses, Ibn al-Jawzī fumes:

> Is [such a scholar] not like someone who pays with a counterfeit coin and conceals it? For indeed most people cannot distinguish a forgery from an authentic [ḥadīth], so if a master ḥadīth scholar presents a ḥadīth, it does not occur to people's hearts but that he has used it as proof because it is authentic.[62]

Ibn al-Jawzī's school of thought on the use of weak ḥadīths proved influential in the century after his death. In particular, it dominated the debate surrounding the controversial supererogatory prayer known as *Ṣalāt al-Raghā'ib* (Prayer of Things Desired), whose advocates justi-

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59) Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, 1:98.

60) Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ*, 103.

61) Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, 1:245. Ibn al-Jawzī did, however, include weak and even forged ḥadīths in his myriad writings. In some cases, such as his belle lettres writings, this was done for humorous purposes. See, Ibn al-Jawzī, *Akhbār al-ḥamqā wa al-mughaffilīn*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Abū al-ʿAbbās (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Sīnā, 1990), 72; idem, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, 1:100.

62) Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Taḥqīq fī aḥādīth al-khilāf*, ed. Masʿad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Saʿdanī and Muḥammad Fāris, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994), 1:464.

fied it by referring to a set of weak and forged ḥadīths.[63] While residing in Cairo, the well-travelled Andalusian scholar Ibn Diḥya (d. 633/1235) wrote a treatise condemning the practice.[64] The work draws markedly on Ibn al-Jawzī, whom the author had met in Baghdad and dubbed "the knight of the pulpit (*fāris al-minbar*)."[65] Echoing Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Diḥya bemoans how men neglect their duties and families, following forged ḥadīths like "[w]hoever dedicates forty days to God, the springs of wisdom will appear from his heart upon his tongue."[66] He repeats his teacher's words exactly in denying the legitimacy of any good sought by attributing to the Prophet something that he did not say.[67]

In a novel contribution, Ibn Diḥya raises the standard for attributing ḥadīths to the Prophet higher than his teacher by removing intentionality from the description of 'lying about the Prophet of God'. He cites a version of the Prophet's famous ḥadīth describing those who lie about him that lacks the intention qualification, meaning that even accidentally attributing a forged ḥadīth to the Prophet carries the threat of Hellfire. Ibn Diḥya warns that "caution in narrating from the Prophet

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63) This prayer first appeared in the early fifth/eleventh century in Jerusalem. Al-Ghazālī presents a ḥadīth mandating it in his *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*. The Prophet is quoted as saying that "No one who fasts the first Thursday of Rajab (*mā min aḥad yaṣūmu awwal khamīs min rajab*…)" and then performs the following prayer will be denied his wish: twelve *rakʿa*s between the Evening and Night prayers, saying Sūrat al-Qadar three times then Sūrat Ikhlāṣ twelve times during each *rakʿa*; upon completing these *rakʿa*s, one prays upon the Prophet seventy times, then prostrates and says '*Sabbūḥ al-quddūs rabb al-malā'ika wa'l-rūḥ*' seventy times, then prays for God's mercy; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1358/1939), 1:202; cf. Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Bāʿith ʿalā inkār al-bidaʿ*, ed. ʿUthmān Aḥmad ʿAnbar (Cairo: Dār al-Hudā, 1978); 35, 41-2; ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, *Musājala ʿilmiyya bayn al-imāmayn al-jalīlayn al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām wa Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ ḥawla ṣalāt al-raghā'ib al-mubtadaʿa*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and Muḥammad Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1423/2002), 39.

64) For a description of the mild controversies surrounding Ibn Diḥya, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalā'*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf and Muḥyī Hilāl al-Sirḥān, vol. 22, 4th ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1406/1986), 389-395.

65) Abū al-Khaṭṭāb ʿUmar b. Ḥasan Ibn Diḥya, *Adā' mā wajab min bayān waḍʿ al-waḍḍāʿīn fī rajab*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh and Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1419/1998), 87.

66) Ibn Diḥya, *Adā' mā wajab*, 18; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, 3:144-5.

67) Ibn Diḥya, *Adā' mā wajab*, 63. Ibn Diḥya uses the same phrase in a lost work *Mā jā'a fī shahr shaʿbān*; see Abū Shāma, *al-Bāʿith ʿalā inkār al-bidaʿ*, 36.

(ṣ) is obligatory" and that "narrating [ḥadīths] without an established *isnād* and assured authenticity (*maʿrifat al-ṣiḥḥa*) is prohibited."[68] Ibn Diḥya thus categorically condemns the use of weak ḥadīths.

The famous scholar and preacher of Damascus (and Cairo), ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262), also built on Ibn al-Jawzī's criticisms of the weak and forged ḥadīths used to justify the *Raghāʾib* prayer. Among the harms of allowing this prayer, he writes in a short treatise on the subject, is that scholars acting on forged ḥadīths or allowing others to do so "give the masses the false impression that [the practice] is among the rites (*sunan*) [of the Prophet]." A scholar thus "becomes one who lies about the Messenger of God through his actions (*bi-lisān al-ḥāl*), which can be equivalent to doing so in words (*lisān al-maqāl*)." Moreover, the scholar becomes instrumental in the masses' misrepresenting the Prophet, "and being a means to lying about the Messenger of God (ṣ) is not permitted (*al-tasabbub ilā al-kadhib ʿalā rasūl Allāh lā yajūzu*)."[69]

In his more general treatise condemning heretical innovation in religion, the Damascene Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī (d. 665/1268) quotes at length from his teacher Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām and from Ibn Diḥya, reiterating the statement that it is not permissible to facilitate lying about the Prophet.[70] Abū Shāma describes one of his teachers in Damascus who was respected for his virtue and knowledge but who would hold ḥadīth dictation (*amālī*) sessions in the mosque during which he would recite weak ḥadīths on the virtues of prayer and fasting during the month of Rajab. Abū Shāma takes this scholar to task, faulting him for falling into the trap of those who feel one can be lax on ḥadīths on the virtues of actions. He explains that this is an error, and that one can never recite unreliable ḥadīths without alerting listeners to their flaws.[71]

Writing a few decades after these early Mamluk-era scholars and building on their work, the Mālikī reformist of Cairo Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 737/1336) articulated a similar position on the use of weak ḥadīths in his discussion on the *Raghāʾib* prayer. Although not formulated as a general rule, Ibn al-Ḥājj states that weak ḥadīths such as those on this

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68) Ibn Diḥya, *Adāʾ mā wajab*; 25-6, 74, 147.
69) Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, *Musājala ʿilmiyya*, 37-38.
70) Abū Shāma, *al-Bāʿith*; 35, 45, 55-6.
71) Abū Shāma, *al-Bāʿith*, 75.

prayer can be acted on only in supererogatory worship and only as long as this is done privately and not habitually.[72]

Ibn al-Jawzī's critique of scholars narrating weak ḥadīths with the justification that they were accompanied by their *isnād*s also resonated after his death, especially among Salafī scholars. Although he subscribed to the mainstream Sunni position on weak ḥadīths, al-Dhahabī seems also to have sensed its potential harm. He notes that it is "a major principle (*aṣl kabīr*) that one should refrain from spreading weak or unacceptable ḥadīths about virtues (*faḍā'il*), beliefs and pious manners (*raqā'iq*)."[73] He rigorously critiques earlier ḥadīth collectors like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038) and Abū Bakr Ibn Mandah (d. 395/1004-5) for filling their various writings with countless forged and weak ḥadīths without notifying the reader about their falsity.[74] The Yemeni reformist Ibn al-Wazīr also objects to the unrealistic assumption that one's readers are qualified to evaluate the *isnād*s of ḥadīths. "There are so few scholars who can investigate *isnād*s," he adds, "so what about non-scholars?"[75]

Not of all of Ibn al-Jawzī's students shared his strong view on condemning weak ḥadīths. Even his most famous Ḥanbalī student did not demonstrate the marked concern over weak ḥadīths found in the works of Ibn Diḥya and others. Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223) of Jerusalem authored what has remained the most comprehensive work on Ḥanbalī law and its proofs, the *Mughnī*. In it, he states concerning the supererogatory prayer known as *Ṣalāt al-Tasbīḥ*[76] that if a worshipper wishes he can act on the weak ḥadīths describing it. "Authenticity (*ṣiḥḥa*) is not required for that optional worship (*nawāfil*) and the virtues of actions," he notes. However, Ibn Qudāma stops short of the

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72) Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, [1990]),4:250, 258-9. For his reliance on Ibn al-Jawzī, see ibid., 4:278.

73) Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, ed. Zakariyyā' ʿUmayrāt, 4 vols. in 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1419/1998), 1:15-16.

74) Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl*, 1: 111; idem, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalā'*, vol. 17, ed. Shuʿayb Arnā'ūṭ and Muḥammad Nuʿaym ʿAraqsūsī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1419/1998), 41.

75) Ibn al-Wazīr, *Tanqīḥ al-anẓār*, 177.

76) The *Ṣalāt al-Tasbīḥ* consists of 4 *rakʿa*s in which one says '*subḥāna Allāh wa'l-ḥamd lillāh wa lā ilāh illā Allāh wa Allāh akbar*' fifteen times at each point of inflection in the prayer. Al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) and Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Madīnī (d. 581/1185) both wrote books on this ḥadīth; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Tarjīḥ*, 42-3, 46.

total confidence in using weak ḥadīths that characterized the mainstream Sunni position. He reminds the reader that weak ḥadīths cannot bestow the legal status of 'recommended'.[77]

The School of Ibn Taymiyya: the Qualitative Unity of Legal Rulings

Ibn al-Jawzī's legacy did, however, resonate with the neo-Ḥanbalī revival of Ibn Taymiyya. Like Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Taymiyya's stance on the use of weak ḥadīths was governed by concerns over preventing the ideological crime of lying about the Prophet. Following Ibn al-Jawzī's treatment of popular preachers, Ibn Taymiyya compiled a collection of forged ḥadīths that frequently appeared in their sermons. Wise words have been spoken by many in history, Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges, but this heritage need not be attributed to Muḥammad. The core commitment of Muslim scholars is to preserve the textual authenticity of the Prophet's Sunna: "Much speech has sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) meaning. But one cannot say 'from the Messenger' for what he did not say."[78]

Ibn Taymiyya also introduced a novel notion to discussion on the topic: the qualitative unity of legal rulings. The mainstream Sunni position described above, especially that of Ḥanafī scholars like Ibn Humām, conflated ḥadīths on the virtues of actions, exhortatory/dissuasive ḥadīths and ḥadīths establishing actions as legally recommened—all lay safely outside the realm of 'the forbidden and permitted.' Ibn Taymiyya, however, draws a sharp distinction between, on the one hand, ḥadīths on the virtues of actions and exhortation/dissuasion, and on the other hand, ḥadīths labeling an act legally recommended. The

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77) Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Mughnī*, ed. ʿAbdallāh al-Turkī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥalw (Cairo: Hujr, 1406/1986), 2:552.

78) Ibn Taymiyya, *Aḥādīth al-quṣṣāṣ*, ed. Muḥammad Luṭfī al-Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1408/1988), 91. Mullā 'Alī al-Qāri' echoes this idea: "and the ḥadīth scholar (*muḥaddith*) concerns himself only with the wording (*lafẓ*), otherwise how many ḥadīths there are about which it is said 'it has no basis' or 'forged' but its meaning exists in the Qur'ān or the Sunna"; Mullā ʿAlī al-Qāri', *al-Maṣnūʿ fī maʿrifat al-ḥadīth al-mawḍūʿ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 6th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 1426/2005), 172; See also Aḥmad al-Ghumārī, *al-Mudāwī li-ʿilal al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr wa sharḥay al-Munāwī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1996), 1:214-15.

status of legally recommended (*istiḥbāb*), Ibn Taymiyya notes, is a Shariah ruling that requires a Shariah proof, "and whoever reports from God that He likes an act with no legal proof has established in religion what God has not given permission for, just as if he had established something as required or forbidden."

Ibn Taymiyya argued that when Ibn Ḥanbal and others had accepted using dubious ḥadīths (as long as they were not forged), what they were intending was limited to the virtues of actions and exhortation/dissuasion. These two fields described only the amount of reward/punishment that one would receive from God for actions whose legal status was already established.[79] This is analogous to a merchant, Ibn Taymiyya explains, who is certain he will earn profit but does not know how much. If his expectations prove too high, he suffers no harm since he earns profit anyway.[80] He concludes, "In summary, [weak ḥadīths] are narrated and used in exhortation and dissuasion but not in establishing legal recommendation (*istiḥbāb*)."[81]

Ibn Taymiyya insists on the strength of this position in the course of his argument against seeking the intercession of saints, although the boldness of his claim is undermined by the many scholars who upheld the mainstream Sunni position above. "No one among the imāms," he claims, "has said: it is permitted to make something required or laudable (*mustaḥabb*) on the basis of a weak ḥadīth. Whoever said that has broken with consensus (*ijmāʿ*)."[82]

Ibn Taymiyya also turns the notion of due diligence through providing the *isnād* on its head. He interprets Ibn Ḥanbal's laxity on narrating questionable ḥadīths as an encouragement to record all ḥadīth versions

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79) A Ḥanbali scholar who upheld Ibn Taymiyya's position on weak ḥadīths, Ibn Mufliḥ (d. 763/1362), argued that there are in fact two recorded opinions from Ibn Ḥanbal on the issue: the famous one, which allows the use of weak ḥadīths in the virtues of actions, and another that does not; Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad Ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī, *al-Ādāb al-sharʿiyya*, ed. Shuʿayb Arnāʾūṭ et al., 3 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1996), 2:279, 289-90.

80) Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 18:43-44, 46. See also ibid., 20:145 (Ibn Taymiyya's *Rafʿ al-malām ʿan al-aʾimma al-aʿlām*).

81) Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 18:46.

82) Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 1:191. Here Ibn Taymiyya cites al-ʿIzz Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām's "famous *fatwā*" on the issue of intercession. For examples of weak ḥadīths used to justify seeking the intercession of saints, see ibid., 1:191 ff.

for possible use in cataloging and identifying weak reports, not so that they could ever be acted on.[83]

As we shall see, Ibn Taymiyya's writing on the use of weak ḥadīths was highly influential. Like Ibn Qudāma earlier, however, some later Ḥanbalīs would nonetheless uphold the mainstream Sunni position of laxity. One such figure was Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392), who rejected Ibn Taymiyya's Salafī call to reject *taqlīd* as well as his stance on weak ḥadīths.[84]

Although there is no evidence that the Andalusian jurist Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) was directly influenced by the works of Ibn Taymiyya, his lengthy treatise on heretical innovation (*bidʿa*) reflects Ibn Taymiyya's qualitative unity of legal rulings. Like earlier scholars, al-Shāṭibī states that promoters of heresy justify their ideas through "their reliance on weak, baseless ḥadīths, which are falsely ascribed to the Messenger of God (ṣ), and which are not accepted by the scholars of ḥadīth as fit to be built upon."[85]

Like Ibn Taymiyya, he allows using weak ḥadīths to encourage people to engage in a ritual by assigning eternal benefits to it, provided that the ritual has been otherwise "established by authentic means" and that the weak ḥadīth in question is not forged. One cannot admit weak ḥadīths, however, on practices that contradict principles of religious law (like Islam's ban on monasticism)—"exhortation on such matters is not correct"—or to establish practices that fall under general mandates (such as prayer) but are not justified in their details by sound ḥadīths (such as the *Raghā'ib* prayer). Specifying a certain day or time with some virtue above others, al-Shāṭibī explains, entails a "legal ruling," which can come only from a ḥadīth rated *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan*, the latter being accepted due to its close proximity to *ṣaḥīḥ* ḥadīths.[86] Emphasizing the qualitative unity of legal rulings, he exposes as faulty the claim that authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) proof texts are required only in matters

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83) Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 18:45-46.

84) Ibn Rajab, *Sharḥ ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī*, 1:74; idem, "al-Radd ʿalā man ittabaʿa ghayr al-madhāhib al-arbaʿa," in *Majmūʿ rasā'il al-ḥāfiẓ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī*, ed. Ṭalʿat al-Ḥulwānī, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadīthiyya, 1423/2002), 616-38.

85) Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Shāṭibī, *Kitāb al-Iʿtiṣām*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, [197-]), 1:224.

86) Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Iʿtiṣām*; 1:225, 229-30.

of prohibition (*taḥrīm*) and obligation (*wujūb*) but not of recommendation or discouragement. "This is an arbitrary distinction (*taḥakkum*) with no proof. Rather, there are five [injunctive] rulings (i.e., obligatory, recommended, permitted, discouraged and forbidden)…."[87]

Al-Shāṭibī notes that using weak ḥadīths presents a paradox for the science of ḥadīth criticism:

> And if it were the evident practice of the people of Islam to accept all ḥadīths coming from everyone, there would be no point in their setting up [the system] of approving or impugning [transmitters], which they have all agreed on, or in requiring an *isnād*…. For the heart of the matter is that it be most probable (*yaghliba ʿalā al-ẓann*) without any doubt (*bilā rayba*) that the Prophet (ṣ) actually said that ḥadīth so that we might depend on it in the Shariah and use it as basis for laws.[88]

In the case of weak ḥadīths, he continues, "it is not highly probably (*yaghlibu ʿalā al-ẓann*) that the Prophet (ṣ) said them, so one cannot base a ruling on them."[89]

The Amendment of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, often referred to by Muslim writers only by his honorific 'the ḥadīth master (*al-ḥāfiẓ*)', represented what Franz Rosenthal called "the final summation of the science of ḥadīth."[90] Although he continues to cast a commanding shadow over the Late Sunni tradition to this day, Ibn Ḥajar was, in fact, skeptical of some of its more popular and mystical excesses. He allowed only an austere celebration of the Prophet's birthday,[91] and was frequently cast as a doubting Thomas in Sufi hagiographies.[92] Ibn Ḥajar's stance on the use of weak ḥadīths thus consists of a conservative adjustment to the mainstream Sunni stance in light of objections initiated by Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymiyya.

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87) Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Iʿtiṣām*, 1:231.
88) Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Iʿtiṣām*, 1:225.
89) Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Iʿtiṣām*, 1:225.
90) Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī," *EI²*.
91) N.J.G. Kaptein, *Muḥammad's Birthday Festival* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 63-4.
92) See, for examples, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. Aḥmad al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Sulaymān al-Ṣāliḥ (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1426/2005), 419, 451.

Ibn Ḥajar's senior disciple Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) explains that his mentor allowed the use of weak ḥadīths only on the virtues of actions and then only on three conditions:

1) that the ḥadīth not be "severely weak," such as a report narrated by a known forger
2) that the ḥadīth "be subsumed under a general principle (*aṣl ʿāmm*)" of the Shariah and that no more reliable evidence exist contradicting the ḥadīth in question
3) that the person acting on the ḥadīth not believe it to be authentic, "so that what the Prophet did not say is not attributed to him"[93]

Al-Sakhāwī seems to be reporting these three criteria from Ibn Ḥajar's brief foray into the question of the *Ṣalāt al-Raghā'ib*, in which he lays out these ideas.

It is Ibn Ḥajar's third condition that represents a unique contribution to our debate. Although Ibn Ḥajar mentions as an inspiration Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām's strong condemnation of facilitating lying about the Prophet, no one before him so succinctly required that acting on weak ḥadīths not be misconstrued as attribution to the Prophet. Ibn Ḥajar's opinion bears traces of Ibn al-Ḥājj's concern about the implications of publically acting on weak ḥadīths as opposed to private devotion. Ibn Ḥajar requires that a person acting on a weak ḥadīth "not publicize it, so that he does not act on a weak ḥadīth and make Shariah (*yashraʿu*) what is not law, or so that some ignorant people not see him and think that it is *ṣaḥīḥ*."[94]

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93) Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Qawl al-badīʿ fī al-ṣalāt ʿalā al-ḥabīb al-shafīʿ*, 3rd ed. (Medina: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, 1383/1963), 257; cf. idem, *Fatḥ al-mughīth*, 1:351. We saw earlier that Ibn Ḥajar defended the use of the weak ḥadīth "Ashkalon is one of the two queens…" based on admitting the report under the rubric of the virtues of actions. This discussion occurs in a work defending ḥadīths criticized as forged in the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal. Here, Ibn Ḥajar states that it is "widespread" to use weak ḥadīths as long as they do not pertain to law. Ibn Ḥajar thus seems to be taking advantage of the mainstream Sunni position for the purposes of his argument while upholding stricter standards in other works; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Qawl al-musaddad*, 11-12.

94) Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tabyīn al-ʿajab bi-mā warada fī faḍl rajab*, ed. Samīr Ḥusayn Ḥalabī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1408/1988, addended to idem, *Quwwat al-ḥijāj fī ʿumūm al-maghfira li'l-ḥujjāj*), 11.

Interestingly, Ibn Ḥajar demonstrates sensitivity to the qualitative unity of legal rulings but advances this unity to a new level: all religious actions and beliefs fall under the rubric of the sacred law and require the same caution. His three conditions thus apply to using weak ḥadīths on any matter: "And there is no difference between acting on ḥadīths of legal rulings or virtues, since all is sacred law (*sharʿ*)."[95]

As we shall see, Ibn Ḥajar's amendment has carried great weight. It did not, however, completely displace the mainstream Sunni position of scholars like al-Nawawī and Mullā ʿAlī Qāriʾ. Although he reverently refers to Ibn Ḥajar as the "Shaykh of Islam," al-Suyūṭī sets aside his stance in favor of the mainstream one. Ibn Ḥajar's strictures, he explains, were not sufficiently endorsed by earlier pillars of ḥadīth studies like Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ.[96]

Weak Ḥadīths in the Early Modern and Modern Periods

Ibn Ḥajar's amendment to the mainstream Sunni position has proven influential among scholars in the early modern and modern periods.

The Ḥanafī ḥadīth scholar of Lucknow, ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī (d. 1887), provides the most extensive treatment of the debate over using weak ḥadīths, tracing it from the early Islamic period until his day and outlining the various schools of thought. He does so first in his *Ẓafar al-amānī*, a commentary on the technical terms of ḥadīth criticism, and in a later work of short responses to germane issues, the *al-Ajwiba al-fāḍila*. Al-Laknawī rejects the categorical prohibition on using weak ḥadīths as unsubstantiated but also dismisses the mainstream Sunni position as "silly latitudinarianism (*tawassuʿ sakhīf*)."[97] He notes, like Ibn Taymiyya, that weak ḥadīths should be allowed for the virtues of actions because even if the report is untrue it still

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95) Ibn Ḥajar, *Tabyīn al-ʿajab*, 12. The editor has read this phrase as "*idhan li-kullin sharʿun*." I think it is more likely "*idh al-kullu sharʿun*" and have translated it as such.

96) Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, 1:230. See ibid., 1:53 for a reference to Ibn Ḥajar as *shaykh al-islām*.

97) Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *al-Ajwiba al-fāḍila li'l-as'ila al-ʿashara al-kāmila*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1423/2003), 53.

encourages Muslims to perform deeds already mandated as laudable.[98] Also like Ibn Taymiyya, he rejects the mainstream Sunni position that legal recommendation does not involve establishing a new ruling but rather points out only the virtue of an action. *Istiḥbāb* is a legal status, so how can it be established with a weak ḥadīth?[99]

Al-Laknawī ultimately upholds a modified version of Ibn Ḥajar's three conditions for the use of weak ḥadīths, adding that it is permitted only if no other more reliable evidence exists on the issue. Unlike Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn Taymiyya, however, al-Laknawī sees in the condition of a weak ḥadīth falling under an "established principle of the Shariah" a narrow window for establishing legal recommendation (*istiḥbāb*). If there is no more reliable evidence on an issue and no *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan* ḥadīth contradicts it, then a weak ḥadīth can render an act legally recommended.[100] Al-Laknawī notes that this circumstantial exception reflects the methodology of early Muslim scholars like al-Tirmidhī, who in some instances derived legal recommendation from a weak ḥadīth because it was backed up by Companion opinions.[101] This renewed acceptance of ḥadīths as influential in legislation probably stems from the revivalist atmosphere of Indian ḥadīth scholarship in the wake of the career of Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi (d. 1762), who called for a revitalized reverence for ḥadīths and the interpretive methods of the early Muslim generations.[102] Al-Laknawī's argumentation has proven influential, underlying the position of the influential modern Syrian ḥadīth scholar Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr of Aleppo.[103]

Ibn Ḥajar's amendments also define the stance of the famous Syrian Salafī Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914). Although al-Qāsimī quotes at length those sections of Muslim's introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ* which condemn the use of weak ḥadīths in any way, he implies that the mainstream Sunni position of allowing them outside of legal rulings is more

98) Al-Laknawī, *Ẓafar al-amānī*, 186.
99) Al-Laknawī, *Ẓafar al-amānī*, 191; idem, *al-Ajwiba al-fāḍila*, 53.
100) Al-Laknawī, *Ẓafar al-amānī*, 198-199; idem, *al-Ajwiba al-fāḍila*, 55.
101) Al-Laknawī, *Ẓafar al-amānī*, 187.
102) Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 37.
103) Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, *Manhaj al-naqd*, 294.

appropriate.[104] This is "the relied upon opinion of the imāms," although he adds that "the most qualified scholars (*muḥaqqiqīn*)" apply Ibn Ḥajar's three conditions.[105]

The maverick Moroccan traditionalist ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī (d. 1993) issued a *fatwā* on the issue of using weak ḥadīths, responding that it is allowed outside of legal rulings (*aḥkām*). He notes this is the "majority" position. He adds, however, that Ibn Ḥajar's three conditions apply.[106] Al-Ghumārī also concedes, at least partially, the qualitative unity of rulings. He explains that, although the virtues of actions and exhortation do not entail legal compulsion, they are nonetheless part of God's binding "address (*khiṭāb*)" to humanity.[107]

Al-Ghumārī invokes the permissibility of using weak ḥadīths in the course of his argument for the impermissibility of masturbation. Although the ḥadīths explicitly prohibiting this act and threatening its perpetrator with Hellfire are all weak, he admits them as evidence because they are only providing apotreptic threats for an action already prohibited implicitly by the Qur'ān.[108]

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104) Al-Qāsimī, *Qawāʿid al-taḥdīth*, 114 ff.

105) Al-Qāsimī, *Qawāʿid al-taḥdīth*, 117-19. At another point in the book, al-Qāsimī makes a statement reminiscent of the qualitative unity of legal rulings. Speaking of groups who allowed forging ḥadīths for *targhīb* and *tarhīb*, he states that this is prohibited, "for *al-targhīb wa al-tarhīb* are among the legal rulings (*al-aḥkām al-sharʿiyya*)"; ibid., 157.

106) ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī, *al-Ḥāwī fī al-fatāwā*, 127-29; idem, *al-Khawāṭir al-dīniyya*, 2 vols. in 1 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1425/2004), 2:121.

107) ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī, *al-Hāwī*, 134; idem, *Afḍal maqūl fī manāqib afḍal rasūl* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1426/2005); 8, 79. In another small work, al-Ghumārī rebuts those who try to use laxity on *faḍāʾil* ḥadīths to excuse unreliable ḥadīths on the Prophet's virtues. "Even if *faḍāʾil* are treatly with laxity," he expains, "the *faḍāʾil* of the Prophet (ṣ) are only via well-known and established [narrations] out of fear of intentionally lying about him…"'; idem, *al-Rasāʾil al-Ghumāriyya*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt ([Beirut]: Dār al-Jinān, 1411/1991), 130.

108) ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī, *al-Istiṣqāʾ li-adillat taḥrīm al-istimnāʾ*, 35. As a subordinate argument for using these weak ḥadīths, al-Ghumārī also refers to his older brother Aḥmad's statement that, although in theory Muslim scholars rejected the use of weak ḥadīths for law, they regularly acted on them in practice (see below); ibid., 37.

Modernist Salafīs and Eliminating Superstitions[109]

The Modernist Salafism of Arab scholars like Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) sought to reconstitute the primordial Arab Islam of the Prophet's time in the face of Western encroachment.

In its tone and content, this vision of a purified Islam was a modernized faith stripped of many elements considered irrational or superstitious in the eyes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European thought.[110] Along with Indian reformists like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), ʿAbduh and Riḍā emphasized the centrality of the Qur'ān, reinterpreted through modern scientific means. They sought to marginalize or restrict the vast and eclectic ḥadīth corpus, rife as it was with the anthropomorphisms and Aristotelian cosmology so anathema to late nineteenth-century Modernism.

Modernist Salafīs saw Sufism and popular religious practices in particular as the forces that had steered the Muslim community away from the Islam of the pious early Muslims (Salaf) into benighted ignorance and backwardness. Although not objecting to Sufism as personal piety and a means to communal organization, scholars like Riḍā rejected its rampant attribution of miracles to saints, non-canonical rituals and mystical interpretations of scripture. Sufism was seen as the gate through which foreign elements such as Greek theosophy and Near Eastern fables had penetrated Islam.[111] Modernist Salafīs identified ḥadīths

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109) It is interesting that, despite the nearly universal agreement that weak ḥadīths are inadmissible for substantive legal rulings, several modern Muslim writers have emphasized that *muftī*s should not reference them in *fatwā*s. Such scholars include Jād al-Ḥaqq ʿAlī Jād al-Ḥaqq, the Egyptian Grand Muftī (d. 1996), and the Moroccan scholar ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ghumārī (d. 1995), who mentions this in a book rebutting Dr. ʿAbdallāh Kānūn, who claimed that a *muftī* can use a weak ḥadīth to reply to a question if he feels it suits the situation. This discussion may refer to *muftī*s citing a weak ḥadīth because it succinctly or convincingly sums up their ruling, even though the ruling itself is based on far sounder evidence; Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 239; ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ghumārī, *Naqd al-maqāl fī masā'il min ʿilm al-ḥadīth wa'l-fiqh wa'l-uṣūl* ([Tangier]: [n.p.], [n.d.]), 144.

110) For the most definitive treatment of ʿAbduh and Riḍā, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); 130-60, 222-44.

111) Albert Hourani, "Rashid Rida and the Sufi Orders," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 29 (1977): 231-41.

falsely attributed to the Prophet and stories from Jewish lore (*isrā'īliyyāt*) as the media by which Muslims legitimized these foreign influences.[112] Like Ibn al-Jawzī centuries earlier, in part it was the perceived social cost of these inauthentic practices and the forgeries legitimizing them that alarmed Modernist Salafīs.

In Egypt, influential reformists like ʿAbduh, the Shaykh al-Azhar Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1963) and the Cairo University jurist Muḥammad Abū Zahra (d. 1974) consistently targeted popular religious traditions like the specific prayers, fasts and group liturgies commemorating festivals other than the two Eids. Such popular observances included prayers and fasts marking the middle of the Islamic month of Shaʿbān, when, according to spurious ḥadīths, God fixes people's lifespans and sustenance for the coming year. These reformist scholars rejected such practices because they found no authentic ḥadīths justifying them.[113] Even an Azhar scholar critical of some of the early reformists' Occidentalism, Ḥusayn Aḥmad al-Marṣafī (d. 1889), recognized the social cost and backwardness of much of the specious material propagated by Muslim preachers. He complained that religious storytellers had sown the social ills of dishonesty and unemployment by spreading forged ḥadīths and "irrational stories." Reports characterizing God's forgiveness in inaccurate and excessive terms, for example, encouraged people to sin without fear of accountability.[114]

Modernist Salafīs pinpointed the ḥadīth tradition as a historical weak spot of Islamic thought. Although his most vehement criticisms targeted *isrā'īliyyāt*, Rashīd Riḍā also took up the banner of purging weak and forged ḥadīths from the corpus of Muslim literature. In his journal *al-Manār*, he devoted a discussion to the weak ḥadīths found in al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* and how they had been

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112) For ʿAbduh's and Riḍā's take on ḥadīth, see Jonathan Brown, *Hadith* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 251-56; Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); G.H.A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1969).

113) Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Fatāwā* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1403/1983), 191-92; Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Fatāwā al-shaykh Muḥammad Abū Zahra*, ed. Muḥammad ʿUthmān Shabīr (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1426/2006), 109.

114) Al-Ḥasan al-Marṣafī, *Ru'ya fī taḥdīth al-fikr al-miṣrī* (with text of the *Risālat al-kalim al-thamān*), ed. Aḥmad Zakariyyā' al-Shalq (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li'l-Kutub, 1984), 75-8.

used to justify baseless rituals.[115] He rejected the acceptability of including unreliable ḥadīths in any ḥadīth work, asking rhetorically how a scholar as devoted to the Sunna as Ibn Ḥanbal could have knowingly included forged material in his books and cast doubt on the authentic legacy of the Prophet.[116] Riḍā's student Maḥmūd Abū Rayya (d. 1970) quotes his teacher as asserting that acting on weak ḥadīths and narrating them "has opened upon this *umma* a gate of extremism (*ghuluww*) in religion and the increase of straining rituals of worship that contradict the ease of Islam, to the extent that they have been made religious rites." This despite the fact, Riḍā complains, that most people fall short of carrying out their most basic requirements such as the daily prayers.[117]

Abū Rayya seconds his teacher's evaluation of using weak ḥadīths in his scathing attack on the traditional Sunni science of ḥadīth criticism and the place of ḥadīths in Islamic law, the *Aḍwā' ʿalā al-sunna al-muḥammadiyya* (1958). In a lengthy chapter devoted to undermining the reliability of Abū Hurayra as a ḥadīth transmitter, Abū Rayya identifies him as the genesis of the flawed distinction between ḥadīths dealing with prohibition/permission and those on other topics. It was Abū Hurayra, he argues, who improperly quoted the Prophet as saying, "If you do not make licit something prohibited or prohibit something licit and have conveyed the general meaning [of the ḥadīth] then there is no harm [in narrating it]."[118] The true teachings of the Prophet concerning transmitting his words, Abū Rayya counters, were epitomized in the famous ḥadīth guaranteeing Hellfire to those who lie about Muḥammad.[119] Yes, many scholars allowed the use of weak ḥadīths on

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115) Rashīd Riḍā, "al-Aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿā fī kitāb al-Iḥyā' wa riwāyatuhā," *al-Manār* 12 (1909): 911-12. For Riḍā's *fatwā* against marking the middle of the Islamic month of Shaʿbān with specific rituals, see *al-Manār* 6 (1903): 824.

116) Rashīd Riḍā, "Bāb intiqād ʿalā al-Manār Kaʿb al-Aḥbār wa Wahb b. Munabbih," *al-Manār* 27, no. 8 (1926): 611.

117) Abū Rayya quotes Riḍā's editorial notes on an edition of Ibn Mufliḥ's *al-Ādāb al-sharʿiyya*, which I have not been able to locate; Maḥmūd Abū Rayya, *Aḍwā' ʿalā al-sunna al-muḥammadiyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Ta'līf, 1958), 79.

118) This report is generally understood as indicating permission to transmit the gist of a ḥadīth as opposed to its exact wording.

119) "*idhā lam tuḥillū ḥarāman wa lam tuḥarrimū ḥalālan wa aṣabtum al-maʿnā fa-lā baʾs*"; Abū Rayya, *Aḍwā'*, 164,

the virtues of actions, but "the senior imāms prohibited that." Here he relies on the writings of Ibn Taymiyya as proof.[120]

Like Riḍā and Abū Rayya, Maḥmūd Shaltūt also railed against *isrā'īliyyāt*, especially those included in the genre to which he devoted most of his writing: Qur'ānic commentary (*tafsīr*). Instead of removing weak and forged ḥadīths found in Qur'ānic commentaries, Shaltūt complains, many Muslim scholars "have spread copiously (*aghdaqū*) their evil upon the people and upon the Qur'ān." This was a gross dereliction of duty, since "it was more befitting [these scholars] to set up a barrier between [these reports] and the people that would spare them anxiety (*balbala*) on those issues connected with the Unseen...." Scholars should have shielded the Muslim masses from bizarre and unreliable ḥadīths, since people have, "by their nature, a fixation with hearing and reading bizarre reports (*gharā'ib*)." This fixation only distracts the masses from "any useful reflection on those Qur'ānic verses dealing with beliefs, ethics and goodly actions."[121]

Muḥammad al-Ghazālī[122] (d. 1996), the influential Egyptian Azharī who followed in Shaltūt's footsteps, echoed his teacher's criticisms of weak ḥadīths. In two wildly popular books (the *Sunna al-nabawiyya bayn ahl al-fiqh wa ahl al-ḥadīth* has gone through at least fourteen editions, *Turāthunā al-fikrī* at least nine), al-Ghazālī identifies the social repercussions of unreliable ḥadīths. "Indeed, clouds of weak ḥadīths have obscured the cultural horizons of Islam…," he laments, just as authentic ḥadīths have had their meanings perverted or been misapplied.[123] He notes how in the modern period weak and forged ḥadīths affect beliefs, society, politics and law. "Indeed, I can say that this comes at the cost of those purifying truths that the carrier of the greatest message brought." Thus, unreliable ḥadīths should not be allowed to inform

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120) Abū Rayya, *Aḍwā'*, 266-67.

121) Shaltūt, *Fatāwā*, 56.

122) For a useful study of al-Ghazālī, see Haifaa G. Khalafallah, "Rethinking Islamic Law: Genesis and Evolution in the Islamic Legal Method and Structures. The Case of a 20th Century 'Alim's Journey into his Legal Traditions: Muhammad al-Ghazali," (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2000).

123) Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Sunna al-nabawiyya bayn ahl al-fiqh wa ahl al-ḥadīth*, 11th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1996), 143. It is worth noting that in this work al-Ghazālī states that he had read and appreciated al-Qaraḍāwī's *Kayfa nataʿāmalu maʿa al-sunna al-nabawiyya*; ibid., 73.

"the principles of education, traditions and hallmarks of society that are heeded by public opinion and are held as signs of Islam's truth and objectives in life…."[124]

In a later work, *Turāthunā al-fikrī*, al-Ghazālī further follows Shaltūt in emphatically rejecting the use of weak ḥadīths and reports in *tafsīr*. In fact, al-Ghazālī suggests that al-Azhar convene a taskforce to purge *tafsīrs* of weak and forged material.[125] Commenting on the general practice of earlier Muslim scholars' including weak and forged ḥadīths in their collections, al-Ghazālī quips that scholars like Ibn Ḥanbal seemed to have compiled rough drafts of their ḥadīth works and then died before they could purge them of baseless lore.[126]

Although he insists that weak ḥadīths have no place in the realms of law or creed, al-Ghazālī does allow for some use in areas already well established by the Qur'ān and Sunna. "It is permitted to take heed of weak ḥadīths on peripheral issues or where they provide additional points on what has been already established by respected proofs from the Book of God and the Sunna of His Messenger. This has been the way of our scholars in the past…"[127] Al-Ghazālī was a noted reformist in the vein of Riḍā and Shaltūt, but he was also a very popular writer. The utility of weak ḥadīths for weaving compelling prose may have proven too appealing for him to advocate a blanket prohibition on their use.

In his 1964 classic on the exemplary life of the Prophet (since republished numerous times), *Fiqh al-sīra*, al-Ghazālī defends this limited use of weak ḥadīths against the attacks of Traditionalist Salafīs who categorically rejected them (see below). As a response to criticisms of the ḥadīths he had used in early editions of the book, al-Ghazālī invited the leading Traditionalist Salafī ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) to include his comments on the reliability of these ḥadīths as footnotes in the second edition. Responding to al-Albānī, al-Ghazālī notes that he has been as strict as possible in using only reliable ḥadīths. Since, however, the reader may encounter instances where al-Albānī grades a ḥadīth as weak, al-Ghazālī explains his method: "a

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124) Al-Ghazālī, *al-Sunna al-nabawiyya*, 79.
125) Al-Ghazālī, *Turāthunā al-fikrī*, 8th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), 126-28.
126) Al-Ghazālī, *Turāthunā al-fikrī*, 147.
127) Al-Ghazālī, *al-Sunna al-nabawiyya*, 79.

ḥadīth could be weak according to the preponderance of the ḥadīth scholars, but I may look at its *matn* and find that its meaning is totally in accordance with a verse of the Book of God or a report from the *ṣaḥīḥ* Sunna, so I see no harm in reporting it." Al-Ghazālī allows this, "since [the ḥadīth] has not brought anything new in the realms of law or the virtues [of actions] (*faḍā'il*), nor has it added anything but an explanation to what has already been established by the certain bases (*uṣūl*) [of Islam]." This is in accordance, al-Ghazālī adds, with the established methodology of Sunni scholars.[128]

Traditionalist Salafism and the Total Rejection of Weak Ḥadīths

The most vociferous rejection of using weak ḥadīths in the early modern and modern periods comes from the Traditionalist Salafī school of thought. Rooted in the teachings of revivalists like Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī (d. 1750) and Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, Salafī thought influenced scholars like ʿAbduh and Riḍā by foregrounding the works of Ibn Taymiyya, rejecting rigid loyalties to schools of law and casting the light of suspicion on popular Sufi practices. In turn, the Modernist Salafism of Riḍā directly influenced later Traditionalist Salafīs like al-Albānī, who began his work as a ḥadīth critic when he read Riḍā's *al-Manār* article on the weak ḥadīths in the *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*.[129]

A prominent feature of the eighteenth-century revival and reform movements was a call for returning to the Qur'ān and the Sunna instead of excessive loyalty to existing schools of law. This entailed an enhanced focus on the study of ḥadīths as the primary means of accessing the Sunna directly.[130] Renewed interest in ḥadīths in the eighteenth-century

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128) Al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh al-sīra*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1384/1964), 9-11. Al-Ghazālī praised al-Albānī and the Moroccan polymath ʿAbdallāh al-Ghumārī as "among the firm pillars (*al-rāsikhīn*)" on matters of ḥadīth; al-Ghazālī, *Turāthunā al-fikrī*, 145.

129) Al-Albānī, "*Tarjamat al-shaykh al-Albānī—Nash'at al-Shaykh fī Dimashq*," lecture from www.islamway.com, last accessed 6/3/2004.

130) For the place of ḥadīth in the eighteenth-century revival and reform movements, see John O. Voll, "Foundations of Renewal and Reform: Islamic Movements in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John Esposito, 509-48 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); idem, "Hadith Scholars and Tariqahs: an Ulama Group in the 18th Century Haramayn and their Impact in the Islamic World," *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 15 (1980): 264-73; Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 37;

matured into an effort to recreate the critically stringent methods of early ḥadīth critics like al-Bukhārī and Muslim. This resulted in a resurrection of the schools rejecting the use of weak ḥadīths.

We see an increased unease with the use of weak ḥadīths in the writing of the eighteenth-century Salafī revivalist of Sana'a, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 1768). Like the earlier Yemeni scholar whom he held in high regard, Ibn al-Wazīr, al-Ṣanʿānī disapproves of recording or citing unreliable ḥadīths with the excuse that their *isnād*s are available for evaluation. Such an excuse is untenable, he argues, since neither the masses nor the majority of scholars are qualified to examine *isnād*s for authenticity.[131] Noting the mainstream Sunni position on accepting weak ḥadīths, al-Ṣanʿānī suggests that the ḥadīth "Whoever narrates a ḥadīth that he sees is a lie then he is among the liars" means that using a questionable ḥadīth depends on whether or not one thinks it more or less likely that the Prophet said it. Here he cites the early ḥadīth scholar al-Dārimī (d. 255/869) instructing his student al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) that uncertainty about the details of a ḥadīth and its *isnād* does not entail 'lying about the Prophet.' This warning applies only to serious doubts about a ḥadīth having any basis in Prophetic speech. As a corollary, if it is more likely that a ḥadīth does not come from the Prophet, then it should not be used at all.[132] Like Ibn Taymiyya, al-Ṣanʿānī excludes the use of weak ḥadīths from admission as proof for legal recommendation but not for the virtues of actions and exhortation.[133]

It is the Yemeni scholar who studied with the generation of al-Ṣanʿānī's students, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1834), who interpreted the qualitative unity of legal rulings as a blanket prohibition on using weak ḥadīths. In his compilation of forged ḥadīths, al-Shawkānī

Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought 1750-1850," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993): 347-8; Basheer Nafi, "The Teacher of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī and the Revival of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*'s Methodology," *Islamic Law and Society* 13, no. 2 (2006): 208-41; Jonathan Brown, *Hadith*, 256 ff.

131) Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tawḍīḥ al-afkār li-maʿānī Tanqīḥ al-anẓār*, ed. Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad ʿUwayḍa, 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1417/1997), 2:62.

132) Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tawḍīḥ al-afkār*, 2:54.

133) Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tawḍīḥ al-afkār*, 2:82-3.

rejects the distinction between virtues (*faḍā'il*) and legal rulings in the mainstream Sunni position:

> Indeed all the Shariah laws are on the same footing (*mutasāwiyat al-aqdām*), no difference between them. None of them can be established except by evidence that suffices as proof (*ḥujja*). Otherwise it would be falsely attributing (*taqawwul*) something to God that He did not say. It would carry the known punishment…."[134]

Al-Shawkānī's thought on employing weak ḥadīths directly influenced the most prominent Traditionalist Salafīs after him. The founding figure of the Indian *Ahl-e ḥadīth* movement, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1890) of Bhopal, mentions al-Shawkānī reverently in his collection of Prophetic invocations, the *Nuzul al-abrār*. Khān follows al-Shawkānī in rejecting weak ḥadīths in legal recommendation, virtues and exhortation/dissuasion. "The correct, inevitable stance is that legal rulings are all on equal footing, so it is not befitting to act on a ḥadīth until it is deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan*…."[135] In his *tafsīr* work, the *Fatḥ al-bayān*, Khān rejects the mainstream Sunni laxity on using weak reports for *tafsīr* purposes as well.[136] The great Egyptian Salafī ḥadīth scholar and judge Aḥmad Shākir (d. 1958) also echoed al-Shawkānī's position, as did ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Muʿallimī (d. 1966), a Yemeni ḥadīth scholar who worked as an editor for the Dā'irat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya publishing house in Hyderabad.[137] The late Lebanese *ʿālim* Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ similary rejected

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134) Al-Shawkānī, *al-Fawā'id al-majmūʿa*, 283**.** In his *Nayl al-awṭār*, however, al-Shawkānī says that a large number of weak ḥadīths taken together can establish the legitimacy of a form of supererogatory worship, "especially in *faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*"; idem, *Nayl al-awṭār sharḥ Muntakhab al-akhbār*, ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʾūf Saʿd and Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Hawwārī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1398/1978), 3:330 (*Bāb mā jā'a fī al-ṣalāt bayn al-maghrib wa'l-ʿishā*').

135) He writes after al-Shawkānī's name "*quddisa sirruhu*"; Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, *Nuzul al-abrār bi'l-ʿilm al-ma'thūr min al-adʿiya wa'l-adhkār* (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Jawā'ib, 1301/[1884]), 6-8; cf. idem, *Fatḥ al-bayān fī maqāṣid al-Qur'ān*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀṣima, 1965-), 1:23. For a useful work on Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, see Saeedullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, Nawab of Bhopal* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1973).

136) Khān, *Fatḥ al-bayān*, 1:18.

137) Aḥmad Shākir, ed., *al-Bāʿith al-ḥathīth*, 76; al-Muʿallimī, *al-Anwār al-kāshifa*, 91. For a useful study of Shākir, see Ron Shaham, "An Egyptian Judge in a Period of Change: Qāḍī Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, 1892-1958," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119, no. 3 (1999): 440-55.

completely the use of weak ḥadīths. Not only does the body of *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan* ḥadīths suffice the Muslims, he argued, but "we do not feel in our souls a belief in the reliability of weak ḥadīths. It is, after all, for that reason that we graded them as weak."[138]

The most forceful and articulate rejection of using weak ḥadīths for any purpose comes from the most iconoclastic and influential Traditionalist Salafī scholar of the twentieth century: the Syrian Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999).[139] Like Modernist Salafīs, al-Albānī identifies the causes of many superstitious and baseless beliefs as weak and forged ḥadīths.[140] He notes the arguments of scholars for the permissibility of seeking intercession with God (the *bête noire* of Salafīs) by invoking the Prophet or saints: that weak ḥadīths allowing these are admissible as proof because "weak ḥadīths are acted on as long as their flaw is not severe and they concern matters of exhortation and dissuasion." Al-Albānī objects furiously that the question of the permissibility of seeking intercession is clearly a matter of legal permissibility/prohibition, not one of exhortation/dissuasion. Even weightier than a mere issue of law, the question of intercession is a theological one. In fact, it involves "explicit associationism (*shirk*)."[141]

Building on the treatment of using weak ḥadīths by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and Aḥmad Shākir, al-Albānī explicitly rejects those who claim consensus (*ijmāʿ*) on allowing the use of weak ḥadīths in the virtues of actions. He cites as evidence the objections of titans like Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj as well as lesser figures like Ibn Ḥazm. After presenting Muslim's rejection of weak ḥadīths, al-Albanī asserts, "And this, by God, is what I believe (*wa hādhā adīnu Allāh bihi*), that weak ḥadīths are not to be acted on at all (*muṭlaqᵃⁿ*), not in virtues, not in things legally recommended (*mustaḥabbāt*) and not in any other things."[142]

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138) Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth wa muṣṭalaḥuhu*, 24th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li'l-Malāyīn, 2000), 212.

139) For a discussion of al-Albānī's life and career, see Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 321 ff.; Kamaruddin Amin, "Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*: A Critical Study of his Method," *Islamic Law and Society* 11, no. 2 (2004): 149-76.

140) Al-Albānī, *al-Tawassul: anwāʿuhu wa aḥkāmuhu*, ed. Muḥammad ʿĪd al-ʿAbbāsī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1421/2001), 21.

141) Ibid.; 101, 115, 133.

142) Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, 1:50.

He quotes al-Shawkānī verbatim on the qualitative unity of rulings—all *aḥkām* are "on equal footing (*mutasāwiyat al-aqdām*)."[143]

In his critical recension of al-Suyūṭī's *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr* and Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl al-Nabahānī's (d. 1932) additions (published 1969-74), al-Albānī notes Ibn Ḥajar's three requirements. He astutely demonstrates, however, how these conditions effectively prohibit the use of weak ḥadīths completely. First of all, the requirement that a person know that the ḥadīth is not extremely weak or forged requires either a strong grasp of ḥadīth criticism or consulting an expert, both of which are rare in the modern period. Moreover, people who claim to follow the three requirements for weak ḥadīths frequently violate this rule. Since they have little experience with ḥadīth criticism, whenever someone knowledgeable in ḥadīths warns them of a ḥadīth's weakness "they immediately fall back on the principle claimed here that 'weak ḥadīths are acted on in the virtues of actions', and if you mention this first requirement (i.e., that it not be very weak or forged) they fall silent without speaking a word."

As for the second condition—that the weak ḥadīth be subsumed under some general principle of the Shariah, in that case it is really the principle that is being acted on, not the ḥadīth. Here, al-Albānī explains, the ḥadīth's role is "formal, not actual (*ghayr ḥaqīqī*)…." As for the third condition, al-Albānī comments that "I have learned that the vast majority of those who act on weak ḥadīths in virtues do not know their weakness, and this is against the aim [of the condition]."[144] Here al-Albānī's objection centers on an unprecedented insight: why would people who heard a preacher citing exhortatory ḥadīths act on them if they did not think the Prophet said them?

In a lengthy quotation, al-Albānī also resurrects al-Shāṭibī's remarks about the contradiction between the Sunni commitment to textual authenticity and the use of weak ḥadīths. He asks rhetorically 'what is the point of ḥadīth criticism' if we employ reports that the science rates as unreliable?[145] The categorical prohibition on using weak ḥadīths as

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143) Al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ḍaʿīfa*, 1:653-4.

144) Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, 1:52-5. Cf. al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ḍaʿīfa*, 1:651.

145) Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa'l-tarhīb*, 3 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 2000), 1:60.

articulated by al-Albānī has resonated amongst other leading Traditionalist Salafī ḥadīth scholars as well, such as the Saudi ʿAbdallāh al-Saʿd.[146]

The Traditionalist Salafī rejection of using weak ḥadīths has proven one of the shibboleths of that school of thought. Beginning with Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, Traditionalist Salafī scholars have generated a genre of works devoted to sorting weak from sound ḥadīths in the mainstay ḥadīth books of the Sunni tradition. Khān composed his *Nuzul al-abrār* to summarize earlier books on pious invocations (*adhkār*), like that of al-Nawawī, but to purge them of any unreliable attributions to the Prophet or Muslim saints and leave only prayers from the Qur'ān and the authentic Sunna.[147] Al-Albānī composed a series of books identifying the weak ḥadīths found in famous works such as al-Mundhirī's (d. 656/1258) *al-Targhīb wa'l-tarhīb*, al-Suyūṭī's *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, al-Bukhārī's *al-Adab al-mufrad* and finally the canonical Four *Sunan*s of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.[148]

This rejection of weak ḥadīths forms part of the larger Traditionalist Salafī epistemological vision, which divides ḥadīths into sound ones (*ṣaḥīḥ*) that merit inclusion in religious discourse and weak ones (*ḍaʿīf*) that do not. Scholars like al-Albānī conceive of this division as reconstituting the epistemology of the early *ahl al-ḥadīth*, who described ḥadīths as 'weak' or 'sound' until the appearance of the intermediate *ḥasan* rating in the late third/ninth century. Unlike scholars such as Ibn Ḥanbal who allowed acting on corroborated 'weak' ḥadīths, al-Albānī would classify such ḥadīths as *ṣaḥīḥ*. Authenticity and actionability are corresponding features in al-Albānī's view. This two-fold division of ḥadīths has attracted the ire of many non-Salafīs, who see

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146) Al-Saʿd states that "the correct stance is that weak ḥadīths cannot be used in *aḥkām* or *faḍā'il*"; ʿAbdallāh al-Saʿd, "Sharḥ *al-Mūqiẓa* Part 4" lecture from http://www.islamway.com/?iw_s=Scholar&iw_a=series&series_id=487, last accessed 12/02.

147) Khān, *Nuzul al-abrār*, 4.

148) See al-Albānī, *Ḍaʿīf al-Adab al-mufrad* (Jubayl, Saudi Arabia: Dār al-Ṣiddīq, 1994); idem, *Ḍaʿīf Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1408/1988); idem, *Ḍaʿīf Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1411/1991); idem, *Ḍaʿīf Sunan al-Nasā'ī* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1411/1990); idem, *Ḍaʿīf Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1988); idem, *Ḍaʿīf al-Targhīb wa'l-tarhīb*, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1421/2000); idem, *Ḍaʿīf al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr* ([Damascus]: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, [1969-]). See also from al-Albānī's student Muqbil b. Hādī al-Wādiʿī (d. 2001), *al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-musnad min asbāb al-nuzūl* ([n.p.]: al-Jāmiʿa al-Islāmiyya, [n.d.]).

it as dismissing the long-standing Sunni division of ḥadīths into the three levels of *ṣaḥīḥ*/*ḥasan*/*ḍaʿīf* and the mainstream acceptance of acting on weak ḥadīths. Such critics view the division of the Four *Sunan* into weak and sound ḥadīths as preposterous. The authors of these great collections, they contend, included ḥadīths that were either authentic on the basis of their *isnād*, bolstered by communal practice, or reliable enough to be used in non-legal fields. All the contents were applicable in one realm or the other.[149]

The Traditionalist Salafī school of al-Albānī has also strongly influenced the controversial and popular Egyptian scholar Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, whose writing on weak ḥadīths combines Modernist and Traditionalist Salafī concerns.[150] In his landmark work *Kayfa nataʿāmalu maʿa al-sunna al-nabawiyya*, he notes that weak ḥadīths have been allowed on the virtues of actions according to certain conditions, "but many [Muslims] have badly exploited their use and have gone astray from the straight path and contaminated the pure well-spring of Islam." Like Riḍā and al-Albānī, he remarks that "books of preaching, manners (*raqāʾiq*) and Sufism are replete with this type of ḥadīth," as are *tafsīr*s.[151] Al-Qaraḍāwī seconds al-Albānī's conclusion that Ibn Ḥajar's three conditions effectively prohibit using weak ḥadīths and praises al-Albānī's works identifying weak ḥadīths in mainstay ḥadīth collections.[152]

Like Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Qaraḍāwī emphasizes the social cost of utilizing weak ḥadīths in public religious discourse. He writes that, even if ḥadīths used in exhortation/dissuasion create no legal rulings, they nonetheless inform an aspect of the public religious worldview. Conscious that his observation is a departure from the legacy of most pre-modern Sunni scholars, al-Qaraḍāwī insists on his observation "even if our earlier imāms never noticed this." He calls on the reader to

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149) See, for example, Maḥmūd Saʿīd Mamdūḥ, *al-Taʿrīf bi-awhām man qassama al-Sunan ilā ṣaḥīḥ wa ḍaʿīf*, 6 vols. (Dubai: Dār al-Buḥūth, 1421/2000), 1:9-177; Gibril Fouad Haddad, *Sunna Notes I* (Turkey: Aqsa Publications, 2005), 100-4; ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, ed., *Ẓafar al-amānī*, 186.

150) For excellent studies on, and contextualization of, al-Qaraḍāwī, see Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, eds., *Global Mufti: the Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009).

151) Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa nataʿāmalu maʿa al-sunna al-nabawiyya* (Herndon, VA: International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1990), 34-5.

152) Al-Qaraḍāwī; 67, 76, 80; idem, *al-Muntaqā min kitāb al-Targhīb wa al-tarhīb*, 1:59.

appreciate "what [using such ḥadīths] entails in terms of ruining the relative status (*al-nisab*) that the all-wise Lawmaker assigned to obligations and acts." "Each act—commanded or forbidden," he continues, "has its own weight or 'cost (*si'r*)' in the eyes of the Lawmaker in relation to other acts." It is not permitted, he concludes, for us to exceed the proper 'cost' assigned to an action by God in the Qur'ān and authentic Sunna.[153]

Al-Qaraḍāwī sees the pulpit and popular religious celebrations as the most dangerous domains for the abuse of weak ḥadīths. He urges Friday preachers to use only relied-upon books of ḥadīths and to avoid the weak and forged, "which have become, tragically, the trade goods of many *khaṭīb*s and religious guides."[154] At one celebration of the Prophet's birthday, al-Qaraḍāwī bemoans, he heard the preachers use only two non-weak ḥadīths![155]

A Surprising Ally: Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī

In the twentieth century, the fiercest intellectual opponent of both the Modernist Salafism of ʿAbduh and Riḍā and the Traditionalist Salafism of al-Shawkānī was Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (d. 1952).

An Ottoman subject of Circassian extraction, al-Kawtharī rose to high levels of Istanbul's religious bureaucracy before fleeing the nascent Turkish Republic in 1922 and settling soon thereafter in Egypt. Possessed of a peerless command of the breadth and depth of the Sunni scholarly heritage and a razor-sharp tongue, the vehemently pro-Ḥanafī, pro-Ashʿarī, pro-Sufi al-Kawtharī penned countless articles and booklets against those he perceived as abandoning the classical institutions of *madhhab*s, speculative theology and Sufism.

In the light of his vehement beliefs, it is al-Kawtharī's stance on the use of weak ḥadīths that constitutes perhaps the only position that he held in common with his Salafī opponents. He upholds Ibn Ḥajar's three conditions, stating that various great ḥadīth masters across the centuries had affirmed them.[156] Al-Kawtharī goes on, however, to

153) Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa nataʿāmalu.*, 78.
154) Ibid., 61-2; cf. 67.
155) Ibid., 68.
156) Al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt*, 46.

support the categorical rejection of using weak ḥadīths advanced by Muslim and al-Shawkānī (he also attributes this position to al-Bukhārī). He notes, "They have a strong argument on that issue that cannot be ignored (*wa lahum bayān qawī fī al-mas'ala lā yuhmalu*)." Al-Kawtharī further buttresses the categorical rejection of weak ḥadīths by attempting to neutralize the statements of Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Mahdī allowing it. These scholars allowed for laxity in transmitting and recording weak ḥadīths, he argues, not using them as proof, "as appears evidently to those who look into their statements."[157]

Al-Kawtharī reveals the reason for his unlikely agreement with his Salafī opponents: the dangers of Orientalism. Discussing a report of the caliph Abū Bakr supposedly ordering a female prisoner to be drawn and quartered, al-Kawtharī lambastes the great Shāfiʿī ḥadīth scholar of Baghdad al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) for including it in his *Sunan* without alerting the reader to its unreliability. He explains, "And some scholars, the horizons of whose thought are narrow, have offered opportunities to the likes of Goldziher to attack Islam and Islamic history by their silence on the disastrous narrations they transmit."[158] Those scholars who take the permissive mainstream Sunni stance on using weak ḥadīths, al-Kawtharī warns, are "destroying a garrison to build a hut."[159] No pedagogical good resulting from them can outway the liabilities they create. In a later essay, al-Kawtharī cautions Muslims to be careful about which reports they feature in the biographies of the Prophet and the early Muslims. Western Orientalists, he warns, exploit these stories to cast Islam in a foul and backward light. Even Ibn Isḥāq's renowned *Sīra*[160] cannot be cited uncritically, since its author relied on unreliable ḥadīth transmitters.[161]

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157) Ibid., 47.

158) Ibid., 55.

159) Ibid., 46.

160) Of course, in criticizing some of Ibn Isḥāq's inclusions in the *Sīra*, al-Kawtharī was not breaking new ground. This had been done by Ibn Hishām in the third/ninth century in that author's recension of the *Sīra*, which removed stories like the Satanic verses and a report that the Prophet considered suicide after his first encounter with Gabriel; A. Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad*, 16th ed. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003); 106, 166.

161) Al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt*, 339.

Defenders of the Late Sunni Tradition

In the face of Modernist and Traditionalist Salafism, one Muslim school of thought has upheld the mainstream Sunni position of al-Nawawī and al-Suyūṭī. Scholars falling in this camp generally identify with the Late Sunni Tradition: a guild-like allegiance to the Sunni schools of law, the Ashʿarī school of speculative theology and Sufi brotherhoods. Such scholars proclaim that it is precisely the pre-modern dimensions of Islam so reviled by the Salafīs that mark Islam's true path. The mainstream Sunni position on accepting weak ḥadīths has been a hallmark of Late Sunni Traditionalists, who cite what they claim as the consensus of pre-modern Sunni scholars on the issue as evidence.

In the early modern period, in fact, using weak ḥadīths took on a baroque tone among Late Sunni Traditionalists. The rector of Egypt's Azhar Mosque, the jurist and theologian Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī (d. 1860), allowed weak ḥadīths even in the lofty realm of theology. Explaining that "weak ḥadīths can be acted on in the virtues of actions" in the context of God's names and attributes, he attempted to justify this unprecedented laxity by distinguishing between the theology of belief and theology of action. Al-Bayjūrī asserted that Muslims can derive information about God's attributes from weak ḥadīths provided these ḥadīths do not affect belief about God (*sic*!) but only influence their acts.[162]

The Indian Ḥanafī scholar Ẓafar Aḥmad al-Tahānawī (d. 1974) also takes the permissive Sunni stance in his *Qawāʿid al-ḥadīth*.[163] His position constitutes part of his rebuttal of Indian Salafīs, who accused the Ḥanafī school of law of denying Prophetic ḥadīths the respect they deserve. Al-Tahānawī's argument for the unconditional use of weak ḥadīths outside of law serves as a plank in a larger argument that the Ḥanafī school has always heeded ḥadīths, even those with lackluster *isnād*s, within their broader legal framework of analogical reasoning.[164]

Other early modern and modern proponents of the mainstream Sunni position have included the Ottoman judge and ḥadīth author

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162) Al-Burhān Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī, *Ḥāshiyat al-imām al-Bayjūrī ʿalā Jawharat al-tawḥīd*, ed. ʿAlī Jumʿa (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1427/2006), 154.

163) Al-Tahānawī, *Qawāʿid al-ḥadīth*, 92 ff.

164) Ibid., 95-110.

Yūsuf al-Nabahānī (d. 1932) and the great Syrian ḥadīth scholar and editor ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997).[165] The contemporary American, English-medium traditionalists Hamza Yusuf of the Zaytuna Institute and Gibriel Fouad Haddad (based in Brunei) also argue for the mainstream Sunni acceptance of weak ḥadīths against Salafī opponents.[166]

Another brother from the maverick Ghumārī family deserves special mention due to his *sui generis* status. Aḥmad b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī (d. 1960), ʿAbdallāh's (see above) older sibling, would seem clearly aligned with the Late Sunni Tradition in his devoted defense of Sufism and an adoration for the Family of the Prophet that bordered on Shiism—he argued that ʿAlī was the best and most knowledgeable of all the Prophet's Companions and that Fāṭima was the first *quṭb* and "source of all mystical knowledge (*manbaʿ al-maʿārif*)."[167] In his methodology, if not in his stances, however, Aḥmad al-Ghumārī closely resembled the traditionalist Salafīs he so despised. He fiercely rejected the "heresy of *taqlīd*" and asserted that the true Muslim scholars were the ones who "had no *imām* other than the Messenger of God and no *madhhab* other than his law."[168]

In his book-length argument that the preferred position in the Mālikī school of law was that Muslims should pray holding their hands in front of them and not at their sides, Aḥmad al-Ghumārī takes the mainstream Sunni position that weak ḥadīths are admissible in debating issues of *faḍā'il* and legal recommendation.[169] However, his argument does not stem from any distinction between these light matters and the high burden of proof required for prohibition and obligation. Instead,

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165) Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, 3rd ed, 2 vols. (Riyadh: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1408/1988), 1:39. Al-Nabahānī's introduction to his *al-Fatḥ al-kabīr*, a three-volume addendum (including approximately 4,400 ḥadīths) to the *Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, is included in al-Albānī's edition; ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, ed., *Ẓafar al-amānī*, 182 ff.

166) Haddad, *Sunna Notes*, 100-4; Shaykh Amin al-Mazrui, *The Content of Character: Ethical Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, trans. Hamza Yusuf ([n.p.]: Sandala, 2005), 54-7.

167) Aḥmad al-Ghumārī, *Al-Burhān al-jalī fī taḥqīq intisāb al-ṣūfiyya ilā ʿAlī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, [n.d.]); 24, 77.

168) Aḥmad al-Ghumārī, *al-Ajwiba al-ṣārifa li-ishkāl ḥadīth al-ṭā'ifa*, ed. ʿAdnān Zuhār (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1423/2002), 65.

169) Aḥmad al-Ghumārī, *al-Mathnūnī wa'l-battār fī naḥr al-ʿanīd al-miʿthār al-ṭāʿin fīmā ṣaḥḥa min al-sunan wa'l-āthār* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Islāmiyya, 1352/1933), 174.

Aḥmad al-Ghumārī reveals his true 'Salafī' colors by bypassing the historical body of Islamic legal thought to return to the methods of the early scholars. He explains that the founding Muslim jurists and their early schools of law regularly accepted weak ḥadīths in even the weightiest problems of law. If one actually examines the ḥadīths that the *madhhab*s originally used as their proof texts (*aḥādīth al-aḥkām*), al-Ghumārī notes, as much as one-half of them are unreliable from a strict *isnād* perspective. These ḥadīths had been accepted as proofs because they seconded *qiyās* or were corroborated by practice or consensus.[170]

Conclusion

The Muslim debate over the use of unreliable ḥadīths forms part of a perennial discourse on the nature of truth in scripture and historical writing: is truth in scripture and history defined by a correspondence to reality or by serving some utility? Does a guardian class have the right to make this decision on the nature of truth for the masses, and can this class indulge superficial falsehoods for the sake of advancing more profound truths? This ancient and more global discussion requires a forum larger than an article for discussion.

From an Abrahamic comparative perspective, the Judaic and Christian traditions have also grappled with the tension between a demand for utility and the primacy of textual authenticity.[171] Neither tradition,

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170) Aḥmad al-Ghumārī, *al-Mathnūnī wa'l-battār*, 180.

171) As articulated by voices like Maimonides (d. 1204), the Judaic tradition distinguished between the paramount place of the legal interpretive tradition (Halakha) as opposed to the less essential body of homilitic and exegetical literature (Aggada). In the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263, the famous rabbi Nachmanides (Ramban) (d. 1270) faced a Christian opponent, Pablo Christiani, who used stories from *midrash* to argue that Jewish scripture provided evidence that Jesus was the messiah. Nachmanides responded that material from the *midrash* is not as authoritative and reliable as Jewish law and that it is not compelling evidence in substantive arguments. In the Christian scriptural tradition, we find varied attitudes on the use and acceptability of the Old Testament 'Apocrypha', those fifteen books that were included in the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate but not in the Hebrew Bible. Medieval Catholicism viewed these books as part of the Biblical canon, since St. Jerome (d. 420) had included them in his Vulgate. During Peter Abelard's (d. 1142) trial for heresy, for example, one clerical participant quoted the Apocryphal *Book of Susanna* as an argument

however, developed a system as elaborate as that of Sunni Islam. Its grading of the admissibility of proof texts according to authenticity and assigning them to tiers of religious discourse is unique to my knowledge.

Early Sunnis allowed ḥadīths whose authenticity they doubted into discourse on manners, preaching and history because they saw these subjects as falling outside the true purviews of religion: law and ritual. Sunni orthodoxy generally accepted this laxity due to the supreme pedagogical utility that many of these unreliable ḥadīths, often colorful and compelling, offered. It was not until the sixth/twelfth century that significant objections rose. Ibn al-Jawzī and those influenced by him saw that it was precisely the effects that these non-legal ḥadīths had on public religious behavior and practice that necessitated rejecting them. Moreover, the mandate of the Shariah was holistic, and the duty to preserve it in its pure form admitted no distinction between laws and preaching.

The scholarly trend that rejected the use of weak ḥadīths was rooted in the reformist wave that appeared among Sunni scholars in the Ayyubid and Mamluk realms in the seventh/thirteenth century and achieved its pinnacle in the landmark works of Ibn Taymiyya. The twin reformist missions of eliminating popular heresies and returning to the scriptural purity of early Islam reemerged in force with the eighteenth-century movements of revival and reform.

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to give Abelard a chance to explain his views. In 1546, the Catholic Council of Trent officially validated the 'Apocryphal' books as part of the Bible. With its core focus on scripture, Lutheranism and its branches have been less receptive of the Old Testament Apocrypha. Although he did not reject them as misguided or forged, in his translation of the Bible Luther placed these books in a liminal area between the Old and New Testaments. He introduces them as "Apocrypha, that is, books which are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures, and nevertheless are useful and good to read." Medieval Christian theologians were generally much laxer on stories involving the lives of saints and not involving principles of faith; Ramban, *Writings and Discourses Volume II*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shiloh Publishing, 1978), 669; H.L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 242; Peter Abelard, "Historia Calimatatum," in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Classics, 1974), 83; *Book of Susanna* 48; George H. Tavard, "The Catholic Reform in the Sixteenth Century," *Church History* 26, no. 3 (1957): 281; Frank C. Porter, "The Apocrypha," *Biblical World* 8, no. 4 (1896): 273; Hoppolyte Delehaye, *The Work of the Bollandists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922), 119.

It is thus no surprise that the categorical rejection of using unreliable ḥadīths gained new ground in this period. It achieved unprecedented success in the modern period, when both Traditionalist and Modernist Salafīs embraced the blanket prohibition on unreliable attributions to the Prophet. Traditionalist Salafīs saw the acceptance of weak ḥadīths as part of Muslims' failure to preserve the sound scriptural foundations of Islam. Modernist Salafīs viewed the body of weak ḥadīths as the seedbed of irrational superstition. Eliminating them was an easy step towards producing a more streamlined scriptural basis for Islam. Moreover, these unreliable ḥadīths carried a high social cost, threatening the Muslim community's ability to assign proper priorities to elements of belief and action. The sense that weak ḥadīths were a liability in the face of Modernity and Western expectations alarmed even al-Kawtharī, a scholar who despised the Salafī reformist mission more than anyone.

Not all schools of modern Islamic thought, however, have cracked down on unreliable ḥadīths. Late Sunni Traditionalists have continued to uphold the classical, mainstream Sunni acceptance of weak ḥadīths. Just as rejecting them became a hallmark of the Salafī attack on the institutions of pre-modern Islam, so have defenders of those institutions embraced the acceptance of weak ḥadīths as a sign of loyalty to them.

Appendix: Books of *Faḍā'il al-aʿmāl* and *al-Targhīb wa al-tarhīb*

- Ibn Zanjawayh, Ḥumayd b. Makhlad (d. 251/855-6), *Kitāb al-tarhīb wa'l-targhīb*[172]
- Ibn al-Sunnī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad (d. 364/974), *Faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*[173]
- Abū al-Shaykh ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Iṣbahānī (d. 369/979), *Thawāb al-aʿmāl*[174]
- Ibn Bābawayh al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-aʿmāl wa ʿiqāb al-aʿmāl*[175]

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172) Brown, *Hadith*, 35.

173) Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 1:198.

174) Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn sharḥ Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, [1973]), 1:453. Al-Dhahabī notes that this book was five volumes; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, ed. Shuʿayb Arnā'ūṭ and Akram al-Būshī, vol. 16 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1419/1998), 278.

175) (Mashhad: Majmaʿ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyya, 1408/[1988]). I owe this citation to Aḥmad al-Ghumārī, *al-Āmālī al-mustaẓrifa ʿalā al-Risāla al-mustaṭrifa*, ed. Fātiḥa Būlaʿīsh al-Tījānī (Beirut: Dār al-Biyāriq, 1422/2001), 117.

- Ibn Shāhīn, ʿUmar b. Aḥmad (d. 385/996), *al-Targhīb fī faḍā'il al-aʿmāl wa thawāb dhālik*[176]
- Al-Bayhaqī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad (d. 458/1066), *al-Tarhīb wa'l-targhīb*[177]
- Al-Ashqar, Abū Manṣūr Maḥmūd b. Ismāʿīl al-Iṣbahānī (d. 514/1121), *al-Targhīb*[178]
- Al-Madīnī, Abū Mūsā Muḥammad b. ʿUmar (d. 581/1185), *al-Targhīb wa'l-tarhīb*[179]
- Qawwām al-Dīn Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Iṣbahānī (d. 535/1140-1), *al-Targhīb wa'l-tarhīb*[180]
- Al-Maqdisī, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn (d. 643/1245), *Faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*[181]
- Al-Mundhirī, ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm b. ʿAbd al-Qawī (d. 656/1258), *Kitāb al-Targhīb wa'l-tarhīb*
- Al-Dimyāṭī, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Mu'min b. Khalaf (d. 705/1306), *al-Matjar al-rābiḥ fī thawāb al-ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ*[182]
- Al-Nasafī, Abū Barakāt ʿAbdallāh b. Aḥmad (d. 710/1310), *Faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*[183]
- Al-Yāfiʿī, ʿAbdallāh b. Asʿad (d. 768/1368), *Faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*[184]
- Al-Burhānpūrī, Muḥammad b. Yār (d. 1698 CE), *Targhīb al-ḥasanāt wa tarhīb al-sayyi'āt*[185]
- Al-Jurāfī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad (d. 1898 CE), *al-Targhīb wa'l-tarhīb* (incomplete)[186]
- Al-Kāndahlawī, Muḥammad Zakariyyā' (d. 1982 CE), *Faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*[187]

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176) Ed. Ṣā'il Muṣliḥ al-Wā'il (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1995).

177) Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 3:219.

178) Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, ed. Shuʿayb Arnā'ūṭ, vol. 19 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1406/1986), 429.

179) Muḥammad Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, *Majmūʿ fihi rasā'il al-ḥāfiẓ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī*, ed. Mishʿal b. Bānī al-Muṭayrī (Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1422/2001), 141.

180) Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1429/2008), 1:418.

181) Ed. Ghassān ʿĪsā Muḥammad Harmās (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1987).

182) Ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī and Aḥmad al-Saqqā (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992).

183) Khalīfa, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 2:511. The ms. is in the Princeton Library.

184) Noted in editor's introduction to Ibn Shāhīn, *al-Targhīb*, 1:69.

185) Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 16th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li'l-ʿĀlamīn, 2005), 7:135.

186) Ibid., 1:248.

187) *Taḥqīq al-maqāl fī takhrīj aḥādīth Faḍā'il al-aʿmāl*, ed. Laṭīf al-Raḥmān al-Bahrā'ijī (Dubai: Maktabat al-Ḥaramayn, 1425/2004).

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